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ONE OF HIS MOST MESMERISING
PERFORMANCES"**

SHORTLIST

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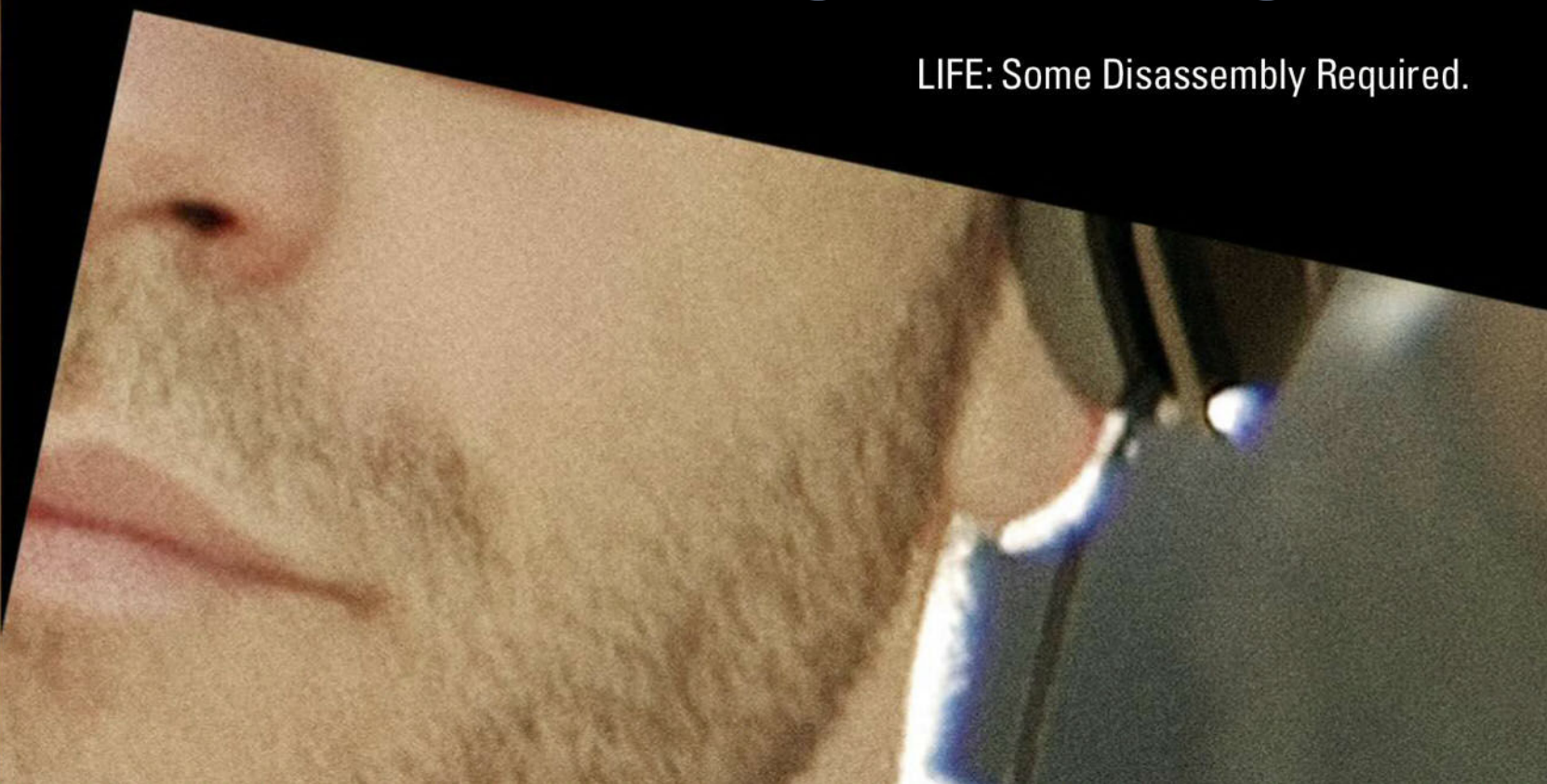
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DEMOLITION

LIFE: Some Disassembly Required.





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The Flash
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Meet Barry Allen, a CSI investigator
suddenly develops a need for speed.

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Mad Max Fury Road

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ED'S LETTER

AS I WRITE THIS, THE WORLD IS GEARING UP FOR THE Oscars; as you read this, the ceremony will have happened. While normally a hotbed of debate around who's been robbed, who didn't deserve it, who did, what history will remember and what it will forget, this year it's taken a different turn. Unless you've been nestled under a rock, you'll know the awards have been mired in controversy, with some actors boycotting the event and others planning to attend but publicly criticising the Academy for the lack of diversity in the nominations. Wherever you stand on the debate — and I personally support those taking a stand for what they see as a hugely concerning lack of representation — it's an issue that Hollywood needs to recognise and address. Our world has never been richer, more complex or more diverse, and this needs to be mirrored in the world of movies. Whether it's in filmmakers who break through, actors who bag lead roles, those who receive awards nods or audiences who see these movies, there has to be a greater effort to ensure all genders, races, ethnicities and sexualities are firstly present and visible and secondly celebrated. Aren't movies at their best when they don't just allow an escape from our everyday life but also hold a mirror up to it? Isn't that when they're at their most beautiful, brutal and revelatory? They should say something about the time we're living in, and live on long after all of us, as a historical document that speaks loudly about the time in which they were made.

And when it comes to the world of movies, in so many ways there has truly never been a more exciting time for theatrical and small-screen programming — just look at this issue: the return of Captain America, the arrival of Black Panther, *Daredevil*, *The Jungle Book*, *House Of Cards*, *Pee-wee's Big Holiday*, *The Conjuring 2*, *10 Cloverfield Lane*, *Independence Day: Resurgence...* I could go on. There have never been more places to see this amazing stuff, at any time you choose. So yeah, we've got it pretty damned good. Really, we do. But we could have it better. Specifically, we could *all* have it better. And by the time the Oscars 2017 comes around, the conversation could be a different one entirely. Here's hoping, right?

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"I explained *Inception* to Roger Moore. That went badly."

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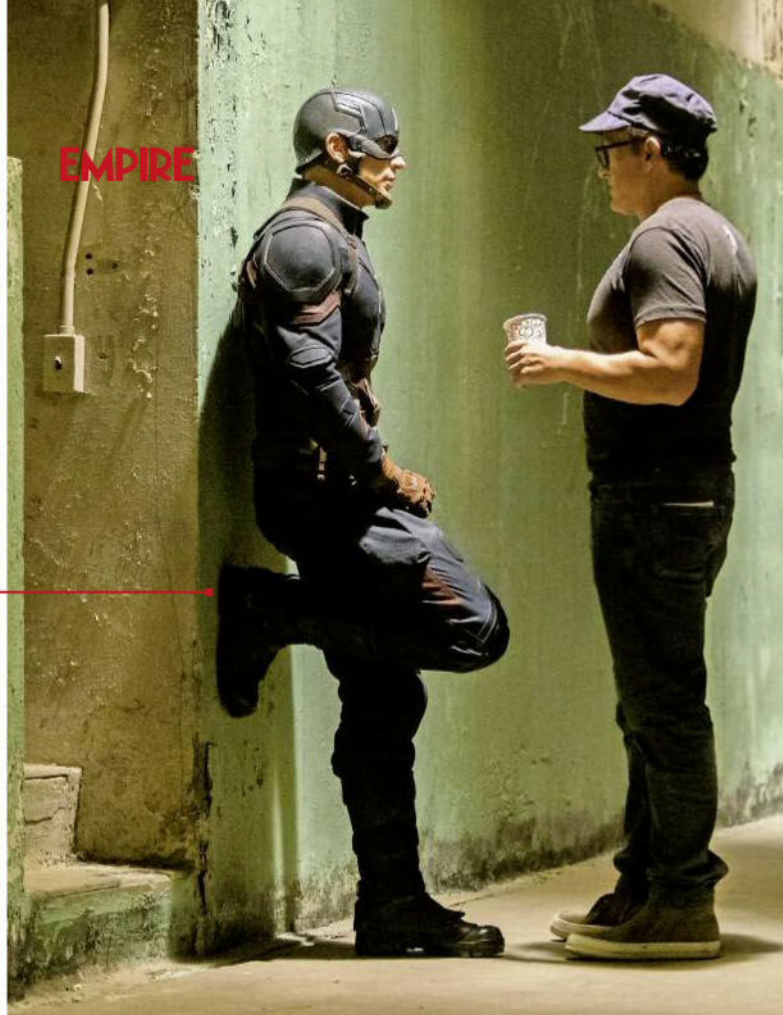
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Clockwise from above: Chris Evans and Anthony Russo Marvel at the coffee from craft services; Michael Fassbender and Kate Winslet discuss the Jobs in hand; Ben Stiller blue steals the shot from Owen Wilson.



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PREVIEW



EDITED by CHRIS HEWITT

FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

ROLAND EMMERICH IS BLOWING UP THE WORLD AGAIN IN *INDEPENDENCE DAY: RESURGENCE*

DON'T THINK IN terms of topping what we did last time," says Roland Emmerich, director of *Independence Day: Resurgence*, the sequel to 1996's epic sci-fi disaster movie.

Correct us if we're wrong, but doesn't that large spike headed directly into the Thames look suspiciously like the Burj Khalifa? Go on — turn the magazine upside down. And, last time we checked, that was in Dubai. And on the ground.

Whatever it is, it's clear it's not going to end well for London, and evidence that topping what he did last time is very much on Emmerich's agenda. But for the director, a man who's never seen a major landmark he didn't want to pulverise like a piñata, it's not just about blowing things up in new and interesting ways. In 1996 it was fine for blockbusters to be absurd. Nobody cared about Will Smith's inner struggles — they just wanted him to punch aliens and shoot stuff. *Independence Day: Resurgence* is invading a very different world.

"The first movie is 20 years ago so all the people who were kids [when they watched it] are now grown-ups. This has to be a movie for people today," says Emmerich. So the story focuses on a new generation, including Maika Monroe as the daughter of Bill Pullman's President Whitmore, and Jessie Usher as the stepson of Will Smith's now-deceased Steven Hiller, coping with what it's like growing up famous. Yet really it's still about aliens trying to wipe out humanity, while humanity, including old-stagers Pullman and Jeff Goldblum as snarky scientist David Levinson, tries to stop them.

"It's fun!" exclaims Emmerich. "I think *Independence Day* was maybe the first movie to combine the alien-invasion movie and the disaster movie. That combination is what we're doing again, but this time, with the new technology, we can do anything." Like dropping the world's tallest building on London? It would seem so. **OLLY RICHARDS**

INDEPENDENCE DAY: RESURGENCE
IS OUT ON JUNE 24.



FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

THE NEXT TRICK

FOR *THE CONJURING 2*,
JAMES WAN BRINGS HORROR
MUCH CLOSER TO HOME

MARYLEBONE station, and the train arriving at platform one is late... by about four decades. Thanks to some epic set-dressing voodoo, the crew working on *The Conjuring 2* have wound the clock back to 1977 and it's scarily convincing. Raleigh Choppers are propped against fences. There's a poster up for *Exorcist II: The Heretic*. Extras are wearing enough corduroy and polyester to qualify as a fire hazard. Stepping off an immaculately grotty British Rail carriage, Patrick Wilson and Vera Farmiga, returning as Ed and Lorraine Warren, the real-life demon-busters whose exploits anchored 2013's *The Conjuring*, exit the platform and climb into an Austin Allegro. Suddenly, Farmiga freezes and her eyes glaze over. In the crowd, *something* is looking back... Five minutes in London and she's already seeing dead people.

The first *Conjuring* took place in Rhode Island, but for the sequel, director James Wan and his team have relocated to Enfield. At first glance, it's all a bit humdrum, but the London suburb just



Lorraine Warren
(Vera Farmiga) pops
in for a flying visit in
The Conjuring 2.



Above: Filming at Marylebone. Here: Madison Wolfe as young Janet Hodgson.



happens to be home to the most aggressive poltergeist case ever recorded. What occurred at 284 Green Street is truly baffling — a sustained poltergeist assault on the Hodgson family that saw 11 year-old Janet strangled by curtains, hurled across rooms and possessed by a sinister entity calling itself Bill.

“Oh, you’ll be hearing and seeing Bill Wilkins,” smiles producer Peter Safran. “The Warrens investigated thousands of cases — what drew us to Enfield was the stark, dramatic contrast. Single mother, four kids, poverty, council house — opposite circumstances to the American family under attack in *The Conjuring*.”

Wan, who’s returning to his first love — horror — after breaking the billion-dollar barrier with 2015’s *Fast & Furious 7*, is keen to recapture the original’s black magic while avoiding its only on-set miscalculation. “You know, a lot of strange stuff happened shooting the first movie in Wilmington,” says Safran. “Weird things, like everyone

waking up en masse at 3am. We’re more prepared this time. We had the set blessed by an exorcist on the first day of production.”

Wait decades for an Enfield poltergeist, then two scream along at once. Sky’s *The Enfield Haunting* covered similar territory only last year. “That was adapted from *This House Is Haunted*, more a psychological drama,” says Wan. “This is very different: the script’s based on what the Warrens saw, along with the Hodgsons’ own experiences.” In fact, Wan’s pledge to “stay close to events” has even won over the notoriously reclusive Hodgson sisters, Margaret and Janet. They were consulted on the script, appear in a cameo and even toured their old house, albeit a version rebuilt on an LA sound stage. By all accounts, the eerie accuracy brought back frightening memories. God help the Hodgsons when they see the finished film. **SIMON CROOK**

THE CONJURING 2 IS OUT ON JUNE 17.

THIS MONTH IN STAR WARS



1

RETURNING!

Despite last being seen heading for a trash compactor on the doomed Starkiller Base, Gwendoline Christie has confirmed that the chrome-covered First Order villain Captain Phasma will return for *Episode VIII*.

Perhaps this means Captain Phasma toys were really popular, or could Rian Johnson have big plans for her? Perhaps another showdown with John Boyega’s Finn?

2

DELAYED!

Episode VIII has been pushed back from its May 2017 release to December 15, 2017. It follows the astonishing success of *The Force Awakens*, which also opened in December and promptly sailed past the \$2 billion mark at the box office. With Disney’s other space opera, *Guardians Of The Galaxy Volume 2*, also set for May, it now gives both movies plenty of room to breathe.

3

ROUMORED!

Rogue One, the Gareth Edwards-directed movie about the operation to steal the plans of the first Death Star, may feature some heavy-duty cameos. Whoever wins the race to play the young Han Solo in the 2018 Phil Lord/Chris Miller spin-off may also be introduced, briefly, in this movie, while scuttlebutt suggests Darth Vader might also show up for a spot of heavy breathing...

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

MURRAY'S MINTS

**NUGGETS OF WISDOM FROM
THE WORLD'S FUNNIEST MAN**



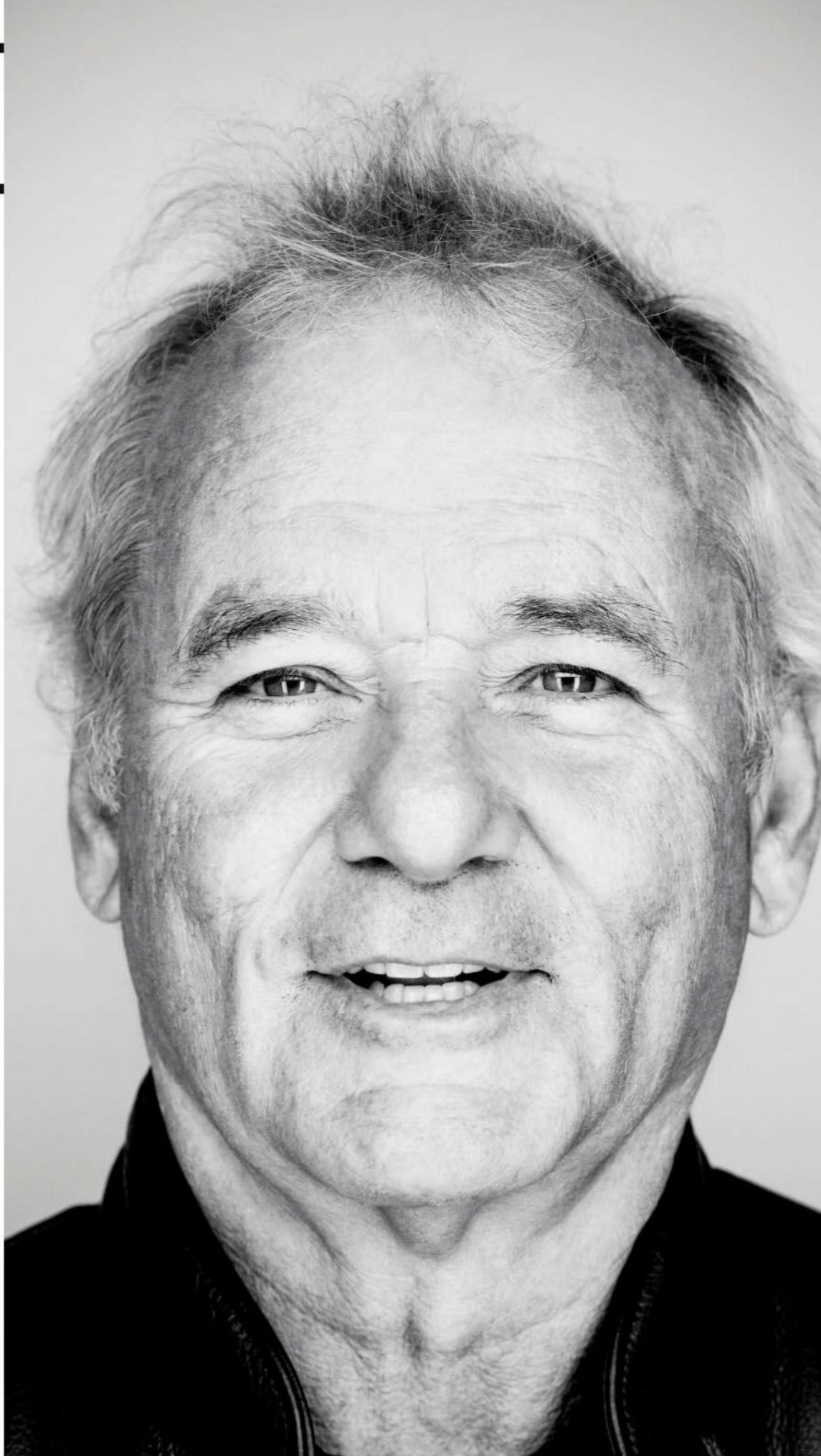
HERE HAVE BEEN cameos, there have been supporting roles, and there have been lead roles in offbeat fare like *St. Vincent*.

But believe it or not, it's been over a decade since Bill Murray toplined an out-and-out comedy. That was Wes Anderson's *The Life Aquatic With Steve Zissou*, and if that's still a little too arch for you, then it's been an astonishing 19 years since *The Man Who Knew Too Little*. That's a long time for the funniest man in the world not to be plying his trade. But Murray the mirth-maker is back this month in Barry Levinson's *Rock The Kasbah*, in which he plays a failed rock promoter on an eventful tour of Afghanistan.

With Afghanistan unavailable, *Empire* went to the movie's set in Marrakech, where we saw first-hand the full effects of the Murricane. It's not every day you interview a man who's straddling an inflatable alligator in a swimming pool, but then, it's not every day you interview Bill Murray. "Well, are you coming in?" he asks, splashing *Empire* gently. Well, are you?

He's Pleased About His Comedy Comeback

"I missed doing it. I think if you can be funny you should be funny. But there just aren't that many scripts that are funny. I just do what I like, there's no plan. I thought this movie was going to be a bit more serious, but it's going to be easily, insanely funny. I had no idea how many comic opportunities the script had. We're just able to do crazy stuff."



THE PARTY CRASHER

FIVE TIMES MURRAY HAS JUST JOINED IN...



KARAOKE!

Murray loves karaoke. In 2011, he joined some revellers in New York's Karaoke One 7, and dueted on Elvis Presley's *His Latest Flame*.

BASEBALL!

Murray co-owns the minor baseball team the Charleston RiverDogs. In 2012, when a game was rained off, he gave the crowd something to watch by belly-sliding around on a massive tarpaulin.

BARTENDING!

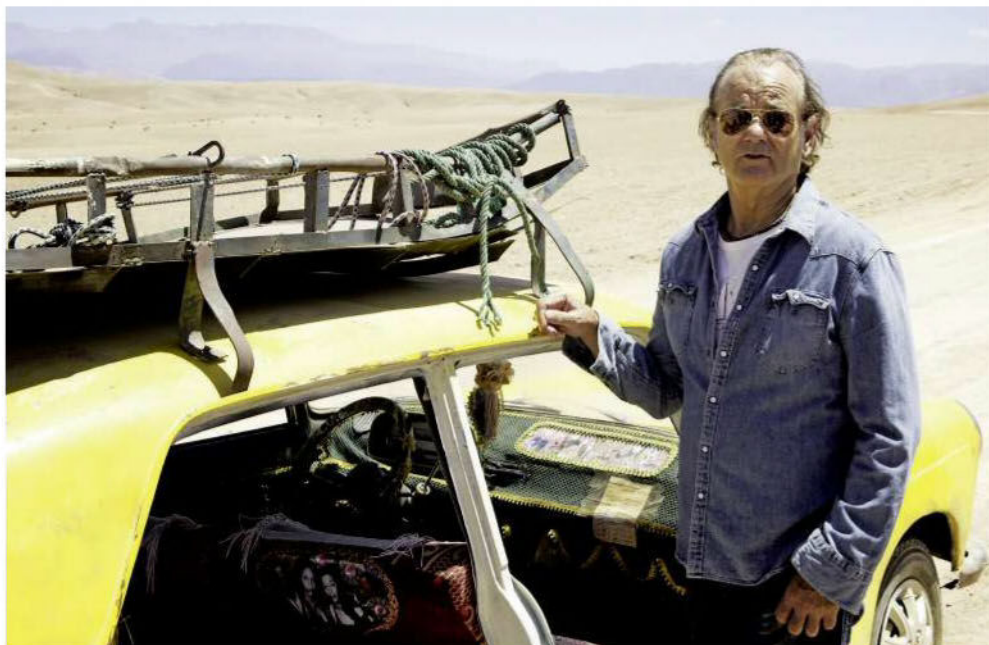
When he visited the SXSW festival in 2010, Murray did shots at the bar with Wu-Tang Clan's RZA and GZA. Then he hopped behind the bar and started serving tequila to the crowd.

DISHWASHING!

In 2006, student Lykke Stavnef met Murray in a bar in Scotland and invited him to a party she was attending. Murray cheerfully tagged along, and helped wash the dishes before he left.

KICKBALL!

In 2012, Chris DiLella was playing kickball with friends in a park on NYC's Roosevelt Island when a stranger grabbed their ball and joined in. It was, of course, Bill Murray, who played for a while, high-fived everyone, then left.



Top: Murray on the set of *Rock The Kasbah*. Above: With Bruce Willis and Zooey Deschanel in the movie.

He Doesn't Like Agents

Some time in the noughties Murray dismissed his agents. Famously, the only way to get in touch with him is via a secret phone number. "I remember just once being in my house trying to relax and the phone rang, like, 75 times. It was my agent's office. The fact that there is someone dedicated to driving you nuts like that, why would you have that?"

Here's Another Way To Reach Him...

Through friends. In particular, Mitch Glazer, the writer of *Scrooged* and *Rock The Kasbah*, has become known as The Guy Who Can Get Your Script To Bill Murray: "It's a bad piece of luck for him. He gets contacted by just horrible people. It happened because Sofia Coppola and he are friends. She wanted me to do her movie (*Lost In Translation*) and Mitch convinced me to go and meet her and talk to her. The result of that is

that people started thinking that the way to get to me was to ask him. But we don't like to advertise that because he's going to start asking for a piece."

He Has A Musical Side

Soon after *Empire* got to set, we overheard Murray and friends singing a Roy Orbison track. "We've always got music playing in the make-up trailers. Whenever there's time, we sing. It's important to keep musical, to keep lyrical. There's something about rock 'n' roll that's fun."

He Has One Regret

In his *Zombieland* cameo, Murray declared he had no regrets. "Well, maybe *Garfield*." Turns out there is another. "The only movie I really ever wanted to do was *The Year Of Living Dangerously*. I would have played Linda Hunt's role, of course. No, Mel Gibson played the part and nobody would have thought of me, but I'd have liked to do it."

He's Not A Prankster

The tales of Murray's pranks have become legendary over the years. Even during our set visit, he took great delight from pushing an unsuspecting journalist (not us) into the pool. But he says it's not his fault. "It's not planned. I get dragged into things. I get pulled into situations. People say, 'Come on in here,' and because you're in a situation and you're a little notorious or famous it changes it for other people..." **OLLY RICHARDS**

ROCK THE KASBAH IS OUT ON MARCH 18.

EMPIRE
SPOILER
ALERT!

THE HATEFUL NINE

JUST WHO IS THE MOST HATEFUL PERSON IN THE HATEFUL EIGHT? WE RANK THEM DEFINITELY...

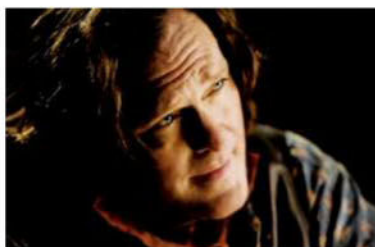
#1 Jody

HATEFUL TRAIT The bonus member of Quentin Tarantino's Hateful Eight — or Hateful Nine, if you will — Channing Tatum's evil cowboy is the sort of sneaky bastard who'll hide in a basement for hours on end, before shooting a man in his Johnson.

REDEEMING FEATURES? He loves his sister. (His psycho hosebeast of a sister.) And he speaks French, the sign of a cultured man who wouldn't shoot anybody.

MOST HATEFUL ACT Shooting Minnie, of Minnie's Haberdashery fame, seconds after teaching her how to speak French.

KILLS: Minnie and Ed, the coach driver. He also shoots Major Warren in the dingus, which looks fatal. He and his sister, Daisy Domergue, are responsible for the whole damn sorry mess.



#2 Joe Gage

HATEFUL TRAIT Michael Madsen's cowpuncher is a cold-blooded, coffee-poisoning sonuvabitch.

REDEEMING FEATURES? He loves his momma. Although she's most likely fictional.

MOST HATEFUL ACT Turning Six-Horse Judy into Two-Bullet Judy.

KILLS: O.B., Judy, John Ruth, Charly.



#3 Daisy Domergue

HATEFUL TRAIT Jennifer Jason Leigh's prisoner is a feral racist who likes the taste of her own blood.

REDEEMING FEATURES? She can play a mean guitar. Emphasis on mean.

MOST HATEFUL ACT Keeping schtum about the poisoned coffee.

KILLS: John Ruth, directly. Everybody, indirectly.

Above: Surprise! Channing Tatum as Daisy's brother Jody, the ninth member of The Hateful Eight.



#4 Oswaldo Mobray

HATEFUL TRAIT Tim Roth's hangman is a pompous, priggish, play-acting psycho.

REDEEMING FEATURES? He does a very good upper-crust English accent. And a Christoph Waltz impression.

MOST HATEFUL ACT Shooting Gemma, who's fetching him jelly beans, for no good reason at all.

KILLS: Gemma. He also fires the shot that will likely do for Chris Mannix.



#5 Bob

HATEFUL TRAIT Demián Bichir's stone-cold killer is, well, a stone-cold killer. Even more unforgivably, he also makes terrible, terrible coffee.

REDEEMING FEATURES? The man can make a piano sing.

MOST HATEFUL ACT Stabbing poor Sweet Dave in the back.

KILLS: Sweet Dave. And he wounds Charly.



#6 General Sanford Smithers

HATEFUL TRAIT Bruce Dern's Confederate is a racist piece of crap.

REDEEMING FEATURES? He wants to do right by his dead son. However, lest we forget, he was racist too.

MOST HATEFUL ACT He doesn't tip anyone off about the true nature of Bob, Joe Gage and Oswaldo.

KILLS: Doesn't actually dispatch anyone. Unless you count himself.



#7 Major Marquis Warren

HATEFUL TRAIT Samuel L. Jackson's bounty hunter is a lyin', connivin' bastard.

REDEEMING FEATURES? As his faked Lincoln letter shows, he has the soul of an artist. He hides it well.

MOST HATEFUL ACT Goading General Smithers into suicide-by-bounty-hunter.

KILLS: Daisy Domergue, General Smithers, Bob, Joe Gage, Jody, Oswaldo Mobray. Not to mention the three corpses he's sitting on when we first meet him...



#8 Chris Mannix

HATEFUL TRAIT If racists had a football team, Walton Goggins' Mannix would be their captain, mascot and treasurer.

REDEEMING FEATURES? As the new sheriff of Red Rock, he mostly means well.

MOST HATEFUL ACT He constantly bellows racist epithets into Major Warren's face. They bond later, but still: not cool.

KILLS: Daisy, Joe Gage, Pete/Oswaldo.



#9 John Ruth

HATEFUL TRAIT Kurt Russell's misogynist will not shy from punching a woman in the face.

REDEEMING FEATURES? He's quite a sensitive soul underneath all the bluster.

MOST HATEFUL ACT Smashing Daisy's guitar.

KILLS: Not a soul. He's the Hangman, after all. He brings 'em in alive. **CH**

THE HATEFUL EIGHT IS OUT NOW.

RICHARD GERE'S BIG ISSUE

THE STAR DISCUSSES GOING HOMELESS FOR *TIME OUT OF MIND*



→ "I COULD SEE PEOPLE MAKE A JUDGEMENT about me," says Richard Gere about playing a homeless man on the streets of New York in *Time Out Of Mind*. "They'd be thinking, 'He's a homeless. He wants money. He's probably on drugs or drunk. Oh, I feel guilty now.' I could see people going through this interior opera from two blocks away. We all do it."

Time Out Of Mind — the title comes from Bob Dylan's 1997 album — represents a labour of love for the actor. It's a moving character study of George (Gere), a sensitive, articulate homeless guy who roams the Big Apple looking for shelter, battling bureaucracy and trying to connect with his estranged daughter (Jena Malone). The actor has nursed the project for 12 years, indie-fying it in the process.

"The original script I bought was a much more traditional thing, with a villain and a court case," he says. "Those kind of things weren't interesting to me. I think there is a human quality to everyone in this."

With writer-director Oren Moverman, Gere created what he describes as a neo-realist way of working, the actor slipping into character on the streets while cameras using long lenses unobtrusively captured the action from a distance. "When the camera is far away, the whole filmmaking process is far away," Gere suggests. "It's much easier to behave and create a more delicate sense of reality."

Given Gere's fame, surely passers-by recognised him and ruined the take for a selfie? "During 22 days of shooting, I only had two people recognise me. And they were both in Grand Central station!" he says. "It was a bizarre thing. But when I was in character on the streets, the vibe I was giving off gave people the cue *not* to pay attention to me." IF

TIME OUT OF MIND IS OUT ON MARCH 4.

FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

LET THE HUNT BEGIN. AGAIN.

JESSICA CHASTAIN AND EMILY BLUNT LEND SERIOUS STAR POWER TO *THE HUNTSMAN: WINTER'S WAR*

IF *EMPIRE* HAD a pound for every time we were told a sequel was “going darker”, we’d have enough cash to produce our own blockbuster. And its darker sequel.

Intriguingly, though, *The Huntsman: Winter's War*, the follow-up to 2012's *Snow White & The Huntsman*, is going in the opposite direction. “The first film was very heavy,” says Chris Hemsworth, who once again plays Eric, the eponymous huntsman. “This time, we’re letting the comedy steer things as opposed to getting buried in the weighty stuff.”

That’s not all. Hemsworth, and Charlize Theron as evil queen Ravenna, may remain, but Kristen Stewart — who played Snow White — has moved on, to be replaced by heavy-duty reinforcements: Jessica Chastain (pictured) as the Huntsman’s true love, warrior woman

Sara, and Emily Blunt as Ravenna’s sinister sister, Freya. Add Chastain and Blunt to any film and you have our curiosity. Give them swords, bows and arrows, and make them fight, and you have our attention. “I’ve been training a lot, so that Sara is absolutely Eric’s equal,” says Chastain. “I love the action stuff.”

That’s evident on the day we visit the Pinewood sets, where we witness an almighty dust-up between Chastain and Blunt on a soundstage converted into the sumptuous courtyard of an ice palace. For Freya, it turns out, can control snow and frost. It’s all very *Frozen*, although she doesn’t want to build a snowman. “I’m mostly skulking around my castle, being evil,” laughs Blunt. “It’s surprising how easily being bad comes to me. Even a bit worrying...” **HELEN O'HARA**

THE HUNTSMAN: WINTER'S WAR IS OUT ON APRIL 8.



LISTEN TO YOUR FRIEND

Billy Zane

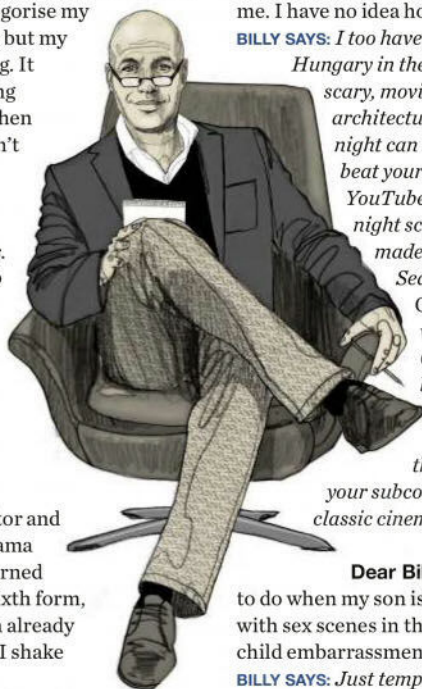
HE'S A COOL DUDE. HE'S TRYING TO HELP YOU (AND YES, THIS IS REAL)

ILLUSTRATION ANDY MACGREGOR

NOT OUR WORDS, BUT THE words of Hansel in the original *Zoolander*. But they made us think — could Billy Zane actually help *Empire* readers with their problems? And now we're proud to say that the answer is, "Yes." Please welcome *Empire's* first Agony Uncle — a man who's dead calm under pressure.

Dear Billy, My girlfriend and I are at breaking point. I have always preferred to categorise my DVD collection alphabetically, but my girlfriend prefers colour coding. It may seem trivial, but it's putting strain on our relationship — when I want to watch *Die Hard*, I don't know where to look. What do you think I should do? PG
BILLY SAYS: One word, PG: Netflix! Otherwise, don't obsess. Go with her colour coding. Who cares? Keep her happy. If you are not watching movies to make out by the second act, you are missing the point of watching movies with your girlfriend. Why do you think they call it physical media?

Dear Billy, I am an aspiring actor and have auditioned for several drama schools but, so far, I've been turned down. I am in my last year of sixth form, yet I can't help but feel like I'm already falling behind in life. How can I shake this feeling? Thank you, RG
BILLY SAYS: RG, seek private lessons and tutoring in acting and start making your own short-form YouTube videos. Google private tutorials, or advertise for professionals who would gladly have another source of income through teaching. As far as digital content goes, keep it about three minutes long, and make them frequently. Try comedy, as that and music garner the most views and subscriptions. Build an audience and collaborate with other aspiring artists, and professionals if you can integrate them. They need it too, trust me. If pros don't get hip to short-form digital they will be passed by. The times are changing. That drama school model is definitely one way, but there are others, and that's just not your path right



now, it seems. The reason will be revealed soon enough. Have faith. And remember, rejection is divine protection.

Dear Billy, I am an art student from Hungary who will be 20 in April. I'm scared of the dark. I guess I was ten years old when I watched both of *The Ring* movies and, since then, Samara has crept me out almost every night. My imagination is super HD. I have to run to the bathroom every night like a crazy person. Maybe this will fade as I grow older, but it's been almost ten years and it's still scaring me. I have no idea how to stop this. Love, GG
BILLY SAYS: I too have been to the bathroom in Hungary in the middle of the night. It's scary, movie or no movie. The classical architecture is stunning by day but by night can be a little ominous. Don't beat yourself up. Just reprogram. Use YouTube. Watch beautiful and romantic night scenes from Hollywood musicals made under the Arthur Freed Unit. Search for An American In Paris, Our Love Is Here To Stay, and watch Gene Kelly and Leslie Caron dance under a bridge by the Seine at night. Or Good Morning from Singin' In The Rain. Makes you wish the sun will never rise. Reclaim your subconscious joy with the help of classic cinema.

Dear Billy, I'm worried about what to do when my son is old enough to watch movies with sex scenes in them. Any advice on parental/child embarrassment avoidance? Yours, SN
BILLY SAYS: Just temper good judgement with good taste. Better that they are sex scenes in movies than offensive clips from porn sites right out of the box. Help him build a healthy appreciation of the physical form through art and cinema. Italian soft core from the '70s and teen movies from the '80s are fairly lame and tame. Respect for the female physically and physiologically is critical early on. It will inform his entire relationship to women. Same with men, I imagine. He will find everything, and build preferences, but a foundation in the possible ideal he may shape might link love, romance, classic beauty and innuendo to arousal.

ZOOLANDER 2 IS OUT NOW.



Bryan Singer's next movie will be *20,000 Leagues Under The Sea*. Which means he'll soon be finding Nemo.



George Miller will be the head of the jury at Cannes this year. Maybe he'll bring this guy with him.



Dan Stevens has joined *X-Men* TV spin-off *Legion*, playing Charles Xavier's son. Stewart or McAvoy? These timelines are so confusing.



Seth Rogen will star with Bill Hader and Zach Galifianakis in astronaut comedy *The Something*. Expect farts. Space farts.



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FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

AN UNEXPECTED DEVELOPMENT

WILL ARNETT AND MITCH HURWITZ REUNITE FOR NETFLIX'S NEW SERIO-COMEDY *FLAKED*

↓

Gob Bluth) and Mitchell Hurwitz (who created the show) together, laughs are pretty much guaranteed. Even their short-lived Fox sitcom, *Running Wilde*, had its moments. So their reunion on new Netflix show *Flaked* is surely a cause for celebration. Polish those funny bones, people, you're going to need them.

"This show's been much more dramatic than anything I've ever done," says Arnett. Wait, what? "*Flaked* is not just a lighthearted comedy," adds co-star Ruth Kearney. "There's also this sad and

f *Arrested Development* — yes, even the somewhat patchy fourth season — taught us anything, it's that if you throw Will Arnett (who played

serious backdrop." Huh? What gives? Did we tell people to polish their funny bones for nothing?

Turns out that although *Flaked* is a comedy, it's 'serio-comic', and Arnett and Hurwitz had loftier goals than making a fiendishly complex laughfest. "We wanted to reflect how we use comedy in our real lives," says Arnett. "There's a certain drama that we all carry within us in our lives."

Arnett, who co-created and co-wrote the show with Mark Chappell (Hurwitz serves here as executive producer), plays Chip, a furniture-store owner and self-confessed guru who gets tangled in a web of lies. "He's like an unofficial mayor of Venice, he knows everybody, and everybody loves him." Arnett used to live in the famously ramshackle LA



Flaked's creator, writer and star: Will Arnett as Chip in the new Netflix comedy-drama.

neighbourhood. "It's changed a lot since I moved there 15 years ago," he adds. "Venice is all about reinvention, and the show is about that: reinvention and change."

Over *Flaked's* eight binge-ready episodes, Chip's world will unravel in a whirlwind of intrigue, deceit and baggage from his less-than-pristine past. There will be opportunities for change, plenty of reinvention, and an honest-to-goodness plot driving things along. "With *Arrested Development*, there was always a bigger story," says Arnett. "The jokes here aren't just throwaway bullshit. They're about something. I think ultimately that's what people will always really want — a real story." **EVE BARLOW**

FLAKED IS ON NETFLIX FROM MARCH 11.



PEEK INSIDE 10 CLOVERFIELD LANE

EMPIRE UNCOVERS THE CONTENTS OF J.J. ABRAMS' LATEST MYSTERY BOX

B

ACK IN 2007, WHEN the first teaser for *Cloverfield* dropped from the sky like the Statue Of Liberty's head, it took the movie world by

surprise. Until that moment, nobody even knew it existed — somehow, producer J. J. Abrams and director Matt Reeves had made a giant monster movie completely in secret.

Now Abrams, who likens cinema to a mystery box, has done it again. On January 15, a trailer hit for a thriller called *10 Cloverfield Lane*. Directed by newcomer Dan Trachtenberg, it stars Mary Elizabeth Winstead as a young lady who finds herself trapped in a nuclear bunker with two men (John Goodman and John Gallagher Jr.). The trailer is largely dialogue-free, but it seems fairly clear that something bad has happened on the surface. Something that could involve a monster...

The title is not a coincidence. Shortly after the trailer broke, various *Cloverfield* websites, which

Above: Dare you enter 10 Cloverfield Lane?
Below: J.J. Abrams. Mystery box not pictured.



had lain dormant since the 2008 movie, sparked back into life. Abrams, who once again produces, has stopped short of calling the new movie a sequel, but in his only public pronouncement on the film to date, he did use the term "blood relative". So this may not be *Cloverfield 2*, rather an extension of the franchise.

But here's where it gets interesting. Soon after the announcement, a theory emerged, claiming that *10 Cloverfield Lane* had actually started life as a low-budget thriller called *Valencia*, and then *The Cellar*. There are records of that movie, including an announcement of Winstead's casting, in September 2014. The theory goes that when Paramount Insurge, the division behind the movie, was absorbed back into Paramount, *The Cellar* was left in, well, the cellar. Then, it's alleged, some bright spark had an idea: take *The Cellar*, do some quick reshoots to tie it into the *Cloverfield* universe and *voilà*: instant cash.

Do a bit of digging online and you can find reports from an early test screening of *The Cellar* that contains no references to monsters. But then, the movie has been a Bad Robot production from the off — and it certainly wouldn't be beyond Abrams and co. to engage in epic misdirection, right down to the removal of any *Cloverfield* links from test screenings. So, which will it prove to be — genuine *Cloverfield* sequel? Clever marketing gimmick? Or just a film about how scary it would be to be trapped in an enclosed space with John Goodman? We'll find out soon... **CH**

10 CLOVERFIELD LANE IS OUT ON MARCH 18.

FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

WANT SOME?

PATRICK STEWART TURNS NASTY IN *GREEN ROOM*

JEREMY SAULNIER clearly likes his colours. After all, his last movie was called *Blue Ruin*, and he's continuing that theme with the nail-biting thriller, *Green Room*. But the key colour here isn't green, or blue. It's red. Blood red.

"I like hybrid genres," says Saulnier. "Look at *RoboCop* — it's a sci-fi action movie but the gore is full-on. I love that kind of aesthetic — and *Green Room* is my opportunity to go full gore."

The movie follows a punk band called The Ain't Rights, who witness evidence of a murder after unwittingly being booked to play for an audience of neo-Nazi skinheads in Oregon. Locked in the backstage area — the green room of the title — the band wait for the cops to arrive, unaware that the neo-Nazis have



other plans. Plans that involve the wrong kind of fretting, shredding and axes.

Saulnier, a former skate punk, has nurtured the story for years, and was even inspired by his own experiences. "Although the film goes to a much darker place, I have been in some scary situations," he says. "Back in the '90s there were a lot more Nazi skinheads walking the streets." After *Blue Ruin* put him on the map, he considered offers to do "something bigger and classier, but I thought, 'Hell no, I've gotta do this!' I was racing against time before someone else had the same idea and made the watered-down Hollywood version."

That version would probably cast a known tough guy to play the neo-Nazis' leader, Darcy. Saulnier plumped for Sir Patrick Stewart, a million miles from the Enterprise or the X-Mansion. "The film I compare it to is John Boorman's *Deliverance*," Stewart says. "Well, maybe the band are not quite as sophisticated as the people in *Deliverance*..." **DAMON WISE**

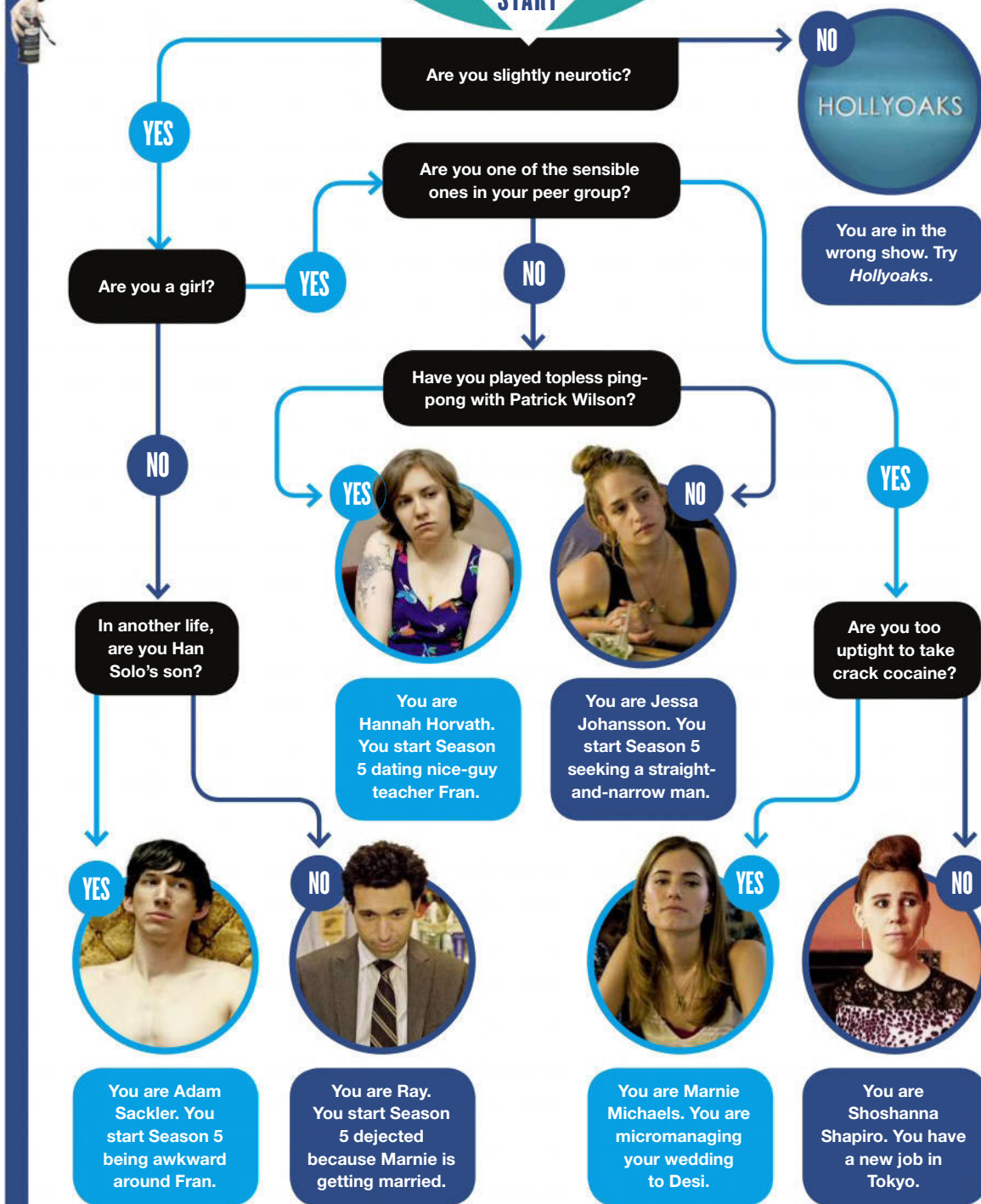
GREEN ROOM IS OUT ON MAY 13.

WHICH GIRLS CHARACTER ARE YOU?

025

LENA DUNHAM'S *GIRLS* IS BACK FOR ITS FIFTH AND PENULTIMATE SEASON ON SKY ATLANTIC THIS MONTH. BUT WHO DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH?

START



Above: Patrick Stewart's Darcy and his boys would like a word. Left: Imogen Poots as Amber. Below: Anton Yelchin as Pat.



FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

HERE BE MONSTERS

JODIE FOSTER DIRECTING A NEW THRILLER? IT'S ENOUGH TO MAKE GEORGE CLOONEY DANCE



HERE'S A B-MOVIE PRODUCER SITTING in an office somewhere, surrounded by posters for schlocky films called *Swamp Freak* and *The Asteroid Beast*, fuming because he didn't secure rights to the title *Money Monster*. Well, he's missed his chance. And his loss is Jodie Foster's

gain — it's the title of her next film as director.

Foster's *Money Monster* is a thriller told not quite in real-time, but close enough that it'd be churlish to quibble with the description. George Clooney plays Lee Gates, a TV presenter who gives stocks advice on his TV show. After one catastrophically incorrect tip, is held hostage by a viewer who lost all his money.

That viewer is played by Brit-boy-done-good Jack O'Connell. And while Foster is pleased Clooney signed on ("That was a crazy happy day," she said. "A happy dance day."



Okay, so she's *very* pleased), she reserves her greatest praise for O'Connell.

"He's amazing. I'm so proud of him," she tells us. "It's an extraordinary performance. He is playing a parcel driver from Queens, and you just believe every second of it. It's very difficult for anyone to completely transform into a totally different character, one that's so specific, and it certainly would be for me. But he just *is* a New Yorker."

Foster, who doesn't appear in the film herself, first read the screenplay in 2012, when it was a very different monster. "The original script was much more satirical and tongue-in-cheek, more of a black comedy," she says. "And once we brought the reality to it, and all the relevance of what's happening now in the financial markets, it changed the tone." Think *Network* meets *The Big Short* meets *Inside Man* (in which Foster starred), and you should be on the right path.

- 1 Clooney as TV tipster Lee Gates, before it all kicks off.
- 2 And on set with director Jodie Foster.
- 3 Julia Roberts as Nancy Fenn, director of Lee Gates' show.
- 4 Jack O'Connell as Kyle Budwell.



This is the fourth film Foster's directed (a point for each if you remembered *Little Man Tate*, *Home For The Holidays* and Mel Gibson puppet dramedy *The Beaver*), and it's certainly been the most complicated to pull off.

"Having everything happen in real time, and having a live broadcast with four cameras running, and also having our film cameras, and having all that happening simultaneously. And *then* having people seeing it all over the world [as the action escalates]?" she says. "The puppet strings of this movie were far more complex than any of the films I've been involved in before. Including *Contact* or any big science-fiction movie. It's still burning my brain now."

It's certainly a far cry from a low-key drama about a man and a hand-puppet. Or a swamp freak and an asteroid beast. **JONATHAN PILE**

MONEY MONSTER IS OUT ON MAY 27.



The Martian



The Revenant

JAMESON EMPIRE AWARDS 2016



Jessica Jones

THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

IT'S TIME TO MAKE YOUR CHOICES FOR THE JAMESON EMPIRE AWARDS 2016

OTING FINGERS AT THE READY! THE Jameson Empire Awards 2016 take place in London on Sunday March 20, and we need you to choose the winners.

The final shortlist of nominees is now online at empireonline.com/awards, and it promises to be a banner year, with the likes of *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, *The Revenant*, *The Martian*, *Spectre* and *Jessica Jones* fighting it out in the major categories honouring the best in TV and film.

The choice is yours. And one lucky voter will win two tickets to attend the Awards, which will be hosted by the brilliant and dashing David Walliams (right).

Once you've voted, be sure to keep up to date with all the A-list to-ings and fro-ings on the big night itself via empireonline.com. We'll have amazing coverage, including live blogs, tweets, interviews, pictures, the winner of this year's Jameson Empire Done In 60 Seconds and much, much more.



THE CATEGORIES

BEST FILM
PRESENTED BY SKY MOVIES

BEST MALE NEWCOMER

BEST FEMALE NEWCOMER

BEST SCI-FI/FANTASY

BEST HORROR

BEST COMEDY
PRESENTED BY ABSOLUTE RADIO

BEST BRITISH FILM
PRESENTED BY THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

JAMESON BEST ACTOR

BEST ACTRESS

BEST DIRECTOR

BEST SCREENPLAY

BEST ANIMATED FILM

BEST THRILLER

PRESENTED BY CORINTHIA HOTEL LONDON

BEST DOCUMENTARY

BEST SOUNDTRACK

BEST COSTUME DESIGN

BEST MAKE-UP AND
HAIRSTYLING

BEST VISUAL EFFECTS

BEST SHORT FILM
PRESENTED BY JAMESON IRISH WHISKEY

BEST PRODUCTION
DESIGN

BEST TV SERIES

BEST GAME

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IN COMFORT

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PREMIERE



ON-SET EXCLUSIVE!

FINDING THE NEON DEMON

EMPIRE TRIES TO UNLOCK
NICOLAS WINDING REFN'S LATEST



HERE'S WHAT NICOLAS Winding Refn wants you to know about his tenth film, *The Neon Demon*: nothing. He won't tell you the plot, and certainly won't tell you what the Neon Demon is. Is there anything he does want to tell you? "Elle Fanning is the star," deadpans the Dane. "And she's really good."

Here's something else we do know: after the Ryan Gosling-fests of *Only God Forgives* and *Drive*, Refn wanted to "work with women". Inspired by his experience working on a Gucci commercial ("I saw an opening image, and from that I created a whole movie"), he crafted the screenplay with first-time feature writers Mary Laws and Polly Stenham. Then he brought Fanning on board.

"He told me his idea about this girl coming to the city, getting into the modelling world. Then he sent me the script," she says. "It was so wacky!"

If it doesn't feel quite right that Refn, whose work tends to probe the darkness beneath the surface, is directing a movie about modelling, then our trip to the vast Canfield-Moreno Estate for the movie's LA shoot last May soon eases fears. We watch as Fanning's teen femme fatale Jesse stands in one of its stately rooms, white curtains billowing as Pino Donaggio's theme from Brian De Palma's 1980 slasher, *Dressed To Kill*, plays. It all feels deeply ominous, as Refn dips his toes into a new genre. "I went to the financiers and I said, 'I wanna do a horror movie,' and they said, 'GREEAATTT!'" he laughs. "So I said, 'I wanna do a *teenage* horror movie...' They said, 'YESSSSSS!!!" A teenage horror movie directed by Nicolas Winding Refn, king of the off-kilter? Maybe that's all we ever needed to know. DAMON WISE

THE NEON DEMON IS OUT LATER THIS YEAR.

FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

BIRTH OF AN OSCAR WINNER?

SUNDANCE MAY HAVE LAUNCHED NEXT YEAR'S AWARDS RACE



SINCE 1978, WHEN the Sundance Film Festival officially started life, a number of Academy Award winners, from *The Usual Suspects*' Kevin

Spacey to *Boys n the Hood*'s Patricia Arquette, have all begun their Oscar journey in Park City, Utah. But the world's most prestigious indie film festival has yet to predict a Best Picture winner. That could all be set to change, after Sundance 2016 threw up two likely contenders for Oscars 2017 in the shape of Kenneth Lonergan's *Manchester By The Sea* and Nate Parker's *The Birth Of A Nation*.

The former, a slow-burn emotional drama about a Boston handyman (Casey Affleck) coping with divorce and loss, sold for \$10 million to Amazon Studios, who pledged to give it a theatrical release. "It generated near-immediate Oscar buzz when it premiered," says *Variety*'s chief film critic Justin Chang. "It does have a certain thematic kinship with past Academy favourites like *In The Bedroom*, *The Sweet Hereafter* and

Ordinary People. It deals in heavy themes relating to grief and family and redemption, and it has an excellent performance from Casey Affleck, which, if there is any justice, will put him in the conversation for the first time since *The Assassination Of Jesse James*."

It was *The Birth Of A Nation*, though, that really got pulses racing. Reclaiming the title from D. W. Griffith's notoriously racist 1915 movie, Parker's movie tells the story of 19th-century slave rebel leader Nat Turner, and was a blood-soaked powder-keg of a film that couldn't have been more timely. While the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite was trending on Twitter, the film — which Parker directed, co-wrote and starred in — became the talking point of the festival. Rumour has it Netflix went all out to acquire it, but with the recent Oscar snub meted out to the streaming giant's *Beasts Of No Nation* perhaps still fresh in the minds of Parker and his team, they sold instead to Fox Searchlight for an unprecedented \$17.5 million, locking in the film for release during Oscar season (traditionally, October to December in the US).

"The cynical view is that *The Birth Of A Nation* was a shoo-in for Sundance's top awards even before it screened simply because, as a film about slavery

A SLIGHT WHIFF

HOW DANIEL RADCLIFFE'S LATEST DIVIDED AN ENTIRE FILM FESTIVAL



ONE SUNDANCE MOVIE it's probably fair to assume it's probably fair to assume won't be bothering the Oscar ballot next year is *Swiss Army Man*. Dan Kwan and Daniel Scheinert's tale of a loner (Paul Dano) who befriends a farting corpse (Daniel Radcliffe) arrived with no little buzz.

However, early screenings of the movie proved divisive, with reports of walkouts from some audience members,

while Hollywood columnist Jeffrey Wells said it was "a film everyone, and I mean everyone, thought was appalling."

Later screenings proved more successful, while the movie also picked up the Dramatic Directing Award for its co-directors, and US distributor A24 bought it with an eye for a summer release. It's certainly worth looking out for, but best stand upwind just in case.



Multi-hyphenate Nate Parker in *The Birth Of A Nation*.

from a black filmmaker, it captures the mood of the moment and speaks to the many issues of justice and representation facing the US and the film industry," says Chang. "My own view is that while the film is by no means perfect, it's a seriously impressive achievement in which you can feel Nate Parker's passion and craft in every frame, and without those qualities, I think goodwill and identity politics only get you so far."

Unsurprisingly for a confrontational and provocative film, *The Birth Of A Nation* may have a difficult year ahead. "It's a powerful film but a tough one as well," says Chang, who warns of an "inevitable backlash". "Historians and politicians, particularly those of a conservative bent, will have their knives out. On a more basic level, some voters may feel some fatigue about this subject matter again just three years after *12 Years A Slave*, and even the strongest supporters of *The Birth Of A Nation* would probably concede that *12 Years A Slave* is a better film. So Parker's movie will have to stand on its own merits."

We'll know for sure at some point in the next few months. For while it may be early days, make no mistake — the race to the Oscars 2017 has already begun. **DAMON WISE**

PREMIERE

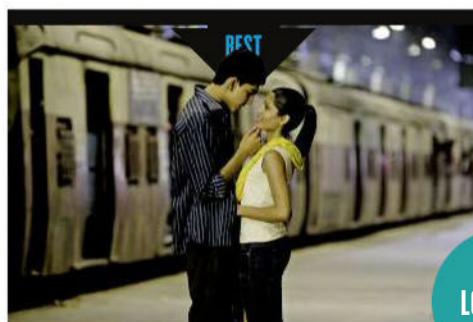
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BEST OF TIMES/WORST OF TIMES

FREIDA PINTO

THE *DESERT DANCER* STAR ON CORSETS, CASABLANCA AND HEAVY COLD



LOCATION

It would have to be Mumbai, for *Slumdog Millionaire*. You're working against the elements in every possible way when you've been to Mumbai. The city stands out. You can't fight it. You just have to be in it.

Probably Casablanca, where we shot *Desert Dancer*. I loved filming in the desert, but Casablanca, I'm not sure. You have this idea of the film *Casablanca* and then you go there and the bubble's burst!

The SAG Awards in 2009. I am a proud SAG winner. When Anthony Hopkins announced the Best Ensemble was going to *Slumdog*, there was a moment of disbelief. It was not just for us actors. Teamwork all the way!



MOMENT

I peaked very early on in my career. There comes a moment when things become really slow. You wonder, "Have I done something really wrong here?" But I found a new path in life, through producing.



I don't know if I got it, but very recently I went for a role that is ten years younger than I am, and it was a real challenge. I knew I managed to tap into the 21 year-old me and still bring strength and maturity to the performance.

AUDITION

You Will Meet A Tall Dark Stranger. I had swollen eyes and a bad cold, and I started improvising because I couldn't remember the lines. I started thinking, "It's Woody Allen and I totally fucked it up." But I got the part!

The *Immortals* costume where I played Phaedra, the oracle priestess. Eiko Ishioka, the costume designer, had such a beautiful idea of femininity. She wasn't interested in boobs and butts and getting it all out there.



COSTUME



As beautiful as that Phaedra costume was, it was equally uncomfortable, because of the corset. Sometimes it was very painful. We had to grin and bear it. It was the good and the bad, both in one costume.

On *You Will Meet A Tall Dark Stranger*, if I made a mistake, I'd correct myself. And Woody Allen walked up to me and said, "Let the mistakes happen because sometimes the mistakes are better than the best takes." Now I'm not afraid of making mistakes.

PIECE OF DIRECTION



Even the not so good notes can be enlightening. You know that's something you don't want to hear again, and the next time you hear it, you just block it out! **CH**

DESERT DANCER IS OUT ON APRIL 22.



EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

BACK FOR ANOTHER ROUND

PADDY CONSIDINE TALKS ABOUT *JOURNEYMAN*, HIS SECOND FILM AS DIRECTOR



T'S BEEN FIVE years since Paddy Considine made his directorial debut with the superb, heart-wrenching drama *Tyrannosaur*.

But just when we began to think that his name should be added to the list

of brilliant actors who directed just one film (Charles Laughton, Marlon Brando, Gary Oldman, to name but three), along comes *Journeyman*. In this exclusive interview, conducted just before the start of shooting, Considine talks for the first time about heading back behind the camera...

You must be excited to be directing again.

I am, yeah. It's been too long. I wasted a lot of time trying to get another film off the ground (*The Years Of The Locust*,

based on the 2009 true-crime-and-boxing book by Jon Hotten).

Where did *Journeyman* come from?

It's an idea that I had for years. I started writing it in Glasgow when I was directing my first short film (*Dog Altogether*, the 2007 BAFTA-winning precursor to *Tyrannosaur*). I did about 20 pages and put it away. Then I was walking recently with a friend of mine, a screenwriter named Geoff Thompson, and he asked about it. So I looked at it again, started fine-tuning and I was off...

Paddy Considine deep in training for his dual role as *Journeyman* star/director.

• DEAN ROGERS AND © INFLAMMABLE FILMS

What's the film about?

It's about a guy who goes into a fight and he suffers a head injury. It's about the impact that has on his marriage and his life and family. When he comes out of the coma, like a lot of people with head injuries, he has a totally different personality. He has to grasp somehow who he once was and what happened to him. That's why it's called *Journeyman*. It's not to do with journeyman fighters. He is a world champion, but really it's about someone going on a journey within themselves and coming to terms with the alteration to themselves, to their personality.

You're starring in this too, and you're in training right now. Do you see it as a traditional boxing movie?

I don't see any point in making a boxing movie. There's loads of them. I've loved boxing all my life and have been around it in various capacities for years and years and years. Boxing was the perfect backdrop for this story, but it's not a boxing movie. There are fights in it, and boxing is in it, but the ultimate victory, if you like, isn't in a boxing ring. The redemption isn't in the fight itself. I'm trying to avoid those kinds of clichés. My crew are asking me which boxing films they should watch. I said, "None!" I don't want them to watch a single boxing film. That's not what we're trying to achieve here.

Are there any autobiographical elements in the film?

I know that I went on quite a journey through my mid-thirties. I kind of disappeared a little bit. I was going through a tough time. I got diagnosed with all these different things (*including Irlen Syndrome, a difficulty processing visual information*), and I feel I got swept under the wave of neurosis and dark and depressing things that were going to destroy me if I didn't turn my life around. It took me a few years to get back. There are echoes of that in the script, echoes of forgetting and being lost and hopefully arriving. People who've read it and who know me have said that they know what it's about. But hopefully it will feel universal. There's something in there that a lot of people will relate to. CHRIS HEWITT

BEHIND THE SCENES

PIN UPS

EXPLORING THE MANY
BADGES OF *HIGH-RISE*
DP LAURIE ROSE



→ LAURIE ROSE (ABOVE, with Tom Hiddleston on the set of Ben Wheatley's *High-Rise*) is one of the fastest-rising cinematographers in the business, renowned for his work on *Made In Stone*, *Bill* and all of Wheatley's films to date. But he also moonlights.

Since 2009, regardless of whether he's shooting a film or a TV show, Rose has had badges made every week (by www.badgestation.co.uk) that he then hands out to cast and crew. "I've had easily 3,500 badges made over the past five years," he says. At about £25 per 100, that's a not inconsiderable outlay of around £875. It's worth it when Badge Day rolls round on set, though. "Friday has become the traditional day for badges, usually heralding the end of the working week," says Rose. "It's not unusual for a queue to form! But it can get quite stressful as you head towards Friday and you haven't come up with anything yet."

With *High-Rise* about to hit, we asked Rose to dip into his collection and talk us through the most memorable. CH

HIGH-RISE IS OUT ON MARCH 11.



"One of my favourite-ever designs, from *High-Rise*. There's only so much you can fit into a one-inch space, and this one is pretty sophisticated. You'll have to see the film to see the relevance of it."



"Another *High-Rise* badge. 'Royal' was an attempt at branding for the Anthony Royal Architects firm (headed up in the film by Jeremy Irons), so it's merchandise within the film itself."



"*Bill* was the first all-out comedy feature I shot. 'Make Way!' was a line from the beginning of the story, and made a great pre-production badge. A rallying cry for the crew as we prepared to shoot."



"We shot *A Field In England* in colour, but Ben was watching everything in black and white. It seemed to be solving a lot of issues we were having with weather and light continuity. This became our motto."



"I often use lines from the script. They almost become catchphrases for the crew. This was an Alice Lowe line from *Sightseers* — the arrow meant you could wear it pointing wherever you felt best."



"This was the final badge of the *Sightseers* shoot. This one was given out at the wrap party. I love designing the badges, it's a brilliant way of making a crew feel part of something special."



"The first badges I ever made, for a 'premiere' screening of our first film, *Down Terrace*, in Brighton. I wanted some merchandise, so badges were born. An early poster design was the inspiration."



"*Kill List* was the first time I made a badge every week of the shoot. This one with the German slogan was made during pre-production. If you join the team, everyone gets a badge."



"This is another *Kill List* badge. The first time I made a badge every week of the shoot. This one was made the week we shot the hammer scene."



"Scene 15 of *Free Fire* (Wheatley and Rose's next) grew in complexity. When we'd finally shot it, Ben issued this to the crew — a total badge of honour."

Who were you in your first school play? Peter Pan, at the Hill Primary School in Caversham. They put me in very green, tight tights and the cap with the feather in it and I danced around a lot, spinning around the gym. Born to never grow up.

Do people ever quote your dialogue back at you? People like the line, "I want to be the Queen" (from *Game Of Thrones*). I do get that one, but not as much as you'd think. I was asked a lot whether I killed Joffrey a couple of years ago and everyone's favourite question now is whether Jon Snow is dead.

What's your answer? I'm like, "Come on, guys, you only have to wait until April."

What scares you? I'm afraid of cliff faces. Sheer drops off a cliff. Think Beachy Head in Sussex. That scares me.

So, heights? Very specifically heights without any kind of railing there. I'm weirdly okay if there's a barrier. You'd think that having done *The Forest* I'd be a bit wary of trees, but I love trees. I'm a Kew Gardens member, and I have been known to hug a tree in the past.

How much is a pint of milk? I'm guessing it's around 50p. I don't drink a lot of milk. I'm one of those wanky actors that only drinks almond milk.

On a scale of one to ten, how famous are you? I know that Maggie Gyllenhaal said four for this and she's much more famous than me. I think she's a seven or an eight, and I think I'm a five or a six.

What would you do if you woke up tomorrow and found you were Bruce Willis? I'd rub my naked head. I shaved my head for *The Hunger Games*, and I miss the calming sensation of rubbing the stubble on the side of my head.

What's your favourite word in the English language? I have lots. I love language, being an actor. I'm attached to the word "because".

Because? Because I taught my little brother to spell it. And, if you think



HOW MUCH IS A PINT OF MILK?

Natalie Dormer

ALL HAIL THE DAIRY QUEEN OF WESTEROS

PORTRAIT JIM WRIGHT

about it in acting, drama is something happening because of something else happening. It's cause and effect. Acting is reacting because because *because*.

What's your nickname? I've had a few. When I was younger, I was called Trouble in my family. I had friends at drama school who called me Sparky. I'm ND, I'm Nat, I'm Dormer... Gwendoline Christie calls me Dorms.

The Beatles or the Rolling Stones? I reject your premise.

Sorry, you have to choose. Them's the rules. Oh God! Probably the Stones, but you're torturing me. You're asking me to reject songs like *Blackbird*. You're basically asking me to tear out my heart. Thank you!

What would be the title of your autobiography? I have a tattoo on my arm which says, "Fear is the mind-killer", from the Frank Herbert novel *Dune*. Everything I do, I do to challenge myself, so I can grow. So *Fear Is The Mind-Killer*, as it's written on my skin. CHRIS HEWITT

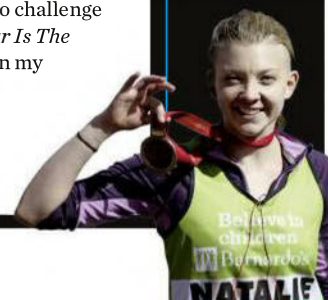
THE FOREST IS OUT ON FEBRUARY 26.

DID YOU KNOW?

— She was a member of the London Fencing Academy.

— She plays the soldier who gives Steve Rogers his first kiss in *Captain America: The First Avenger*.

— She ran the London Marathon in April 2014.



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WAGNERS

THE EMPIRE MOVIE GUIDE | UNMISSABLE ★★ ★★ EXCELLENT ★★★★★ GOOD ★★★★★ POOR ★★ TRAGIC ★





Gladiator 2 lacked
period accuracy.

Hail, Caesar!

★★★★★

OUT MARCH 4 / CERT. TBC / TBC MINS.

DIRECTORS Joel Coen, Ethan Coen

CAST Josh Brolin, George Clooney, Alden Ehrenreich, Scarlett Johansson, Ralph Fiennes, Tilda Swinton, Channing Tatum

PLOT Hollywood, the '50s. Capitol Pictures is making prestige picture *Hail, Caesar!* *A Tale Of The Christ* when its star (Clooney) disappears. Studio fixer Eddie Mannix (Brolin) has to bring him back, while also dealing with other daily issues.



IF SELF-PLAGIARISM were a criminal offence, the Coen brothers would be facing a long stretch in San Quentin.

Hail, Caesar! shares the Hollywood-studio setting of *Barton Fink*, and, no doubt to the delight of Coenverse theorists everywhere, the exact-same fictional studio: Capitol Pictures (they've come a long way from Wallace Beery wrestling flicks). Its plot, such as it is, hangs loosely on a kidnapping hook, just like *The Big Lebowski*, whose Busby Berkeley dream sequence also finds good company in *Hail, Caesar!*'s elaborate musical numbers. It's slathered with the '50s period sheen of *The Hudsucker Proxy*, tussles with similar existential issues to *A Serious Man*, and gathers a sprawling ensemble of big names in character-actor roles, as *Burn After Reading* did. There is an ill-fated suitcase full of money, a shouty fat man, a little yapping dog, philosophical monologues from an eccentric white-hair, and George Clooney mugging.

Though it's not really Clooney's film. As kidnapped matinée idol Baird Whitlock, another George-shaped Coen creation who's two steps behind the rest of the room, he is merely their MacGuffin; like the baby in *Raising Arizona*, only not as smart and a touch more helpless. It's Josh Brolin as Capitol's Head Of Physical Production, Eddie Mannix, who drives things — albeit not always using the most direct route. >

Mannix, the closest thing this movie has to a main character, is another of the Coens' serious men. A fixer for the studio, there's a little of Tom Regan from *Miller's Crossing* about him, though he's armed with petty cash rather than a pistol. He will do something as objectionable as slapping an actress for taking part in an unsanctioned photo-session, but is also wracked with Catholic guilt over lying to his wife about quitting smoking. And there's a greater temptation than tobacco: a big-time job offer from aerospace company Lockheed. "Aviation is serious," he's told. "You won't be shouldering a load of crackpot problems." But Mannix — played by Brolin as a charming bruiser who's not quite as unflappable as he'd like people to think — thrives on the crackpot problems.

Of which Whitlock's disappearance is but one. There's also the matter of cherub-faced B-Western star Hobie Doyle (Alden Ehrenreich) being roped into a pristine, drawing-room drama, to the despair of its mannered English director, Laurence Laurentz (Ralph Fiennes). Then there's the Esther Williams-ish mermaid (Scarlett Johansson), facing the scandal of being both pregnant and unmarried. Plus, rival twin-sister entertainment columnists Thora and Thessaly Thacker (Tilda Swinton, tasked with basically playing a double Hedda Hopper who's at war with herself) are on Eddie's back, too.

This is the Dream Factory operating at maximum productivity, and Joel and Ethan revel in the absurdities of the studio system, whereby directors can't pick their stars, and stars have to change their image at the wag of a fat finger and date who they're damn well told. On the one hand, the brothers are snickering at the silliness of how things used to be, but on the other they are celebrating this bygone Golden Age. Because, beyond all the trademarks, gags and Georgian gurning, what *Hail, Caesar!* essentially amounts to is a series of impressively mounted pastiches.

There's the Johansson-centred synchronised-swimming sequence, featuring a giant, mechanical whale. There's a full-on, astonishingly inventive song 'n' dance number featuring a tap-dancing Channing Tatum and a bunch of sailor-boys lamenting that "We Ain't Gonna See No Dames". There's cowboy Doyle's latest picture, a twee Western named *Lazy Ol' Moon*, complete with a cantankerous prospector-type. And there's *Hail, Caesar!* itself, which glows convincingly with all the grandeur



Top: Surprise! A cameoing Jonah Hill shows off his rubber-stamp collection. **Above:** Ralph's party wasn't quite going to plan.

and pomposity of a true, old-school Hollywood epic. In each case, the Coens' A-crew (including Mary Zophres on costumes, Roger Deakins as DP and Carter Burwell scoring) nail the genre perfectly. It's an astonishing technical achievement.

Where *Hail, Caesar!* falters, though, is in the glue that binds all these elaborate sketches. Mannix's travails don't entwine satisfactorily, and while the flourishes are fantastic, none really move the story forward. It's clear the Coens aren't interested in sustaining the sense of mystery at who exactly has snatched Whitlock, so it's hard for the audience to care either when the big reveal hits. And, as good as Brolin is, the character lacks the culty appeal of, say, The Dude in *The Big Lebowski*, whose shambolic nature matched that film's saggy, shaggy

storytelling. It's not like the film is hollow — hidden at its heart, in fact, is a struggle for the soul of Hollywood — it's just that it feels more like a series of pleasant diversions rather than a single, solid journey.

That said, if you're a committed Coenophile (as we all should be, right?), you're unlikely to be too bothered by all this. Likely to fry the mind of anyone who hasn't yet built up a resistance to the brothers' foibles and predilections over the past 16 films, it's easily the most Coen-Coen movie they've put out. But then, they are stealing from the best. **DAN JOLIN**

VERDICT A sort of-sequel to *Barton Fink*? A pseudo-remake of *The Big Lebowski*? A Dream Factory take on *The Hudsucker Proxy*? *Hail, Caesar!* is all of these things, and more. If only the central story were more focused.



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High-Rise

★★★★★

OUT MARCH 18 / CERT. 15 / 112 MINS.

DIRECTOR Ben Wheatley

CAST Tom Hiddleston, Sienna Miller, Luke Evans, Elisabeth Moss

PLOT Neurologist Dr. Laing (Hiddleston) moves into a pristine tower block in the shiny 1970s, only to see the new society crumble into age-old violence.

WHILE J. G. BALLARD is seven years gone, and the source for this film 40 years old, it still feels alarmingly *now*. The future he imagined in the 1970s, with its affluenza and anger, couldn't feel more relevant today.

Ballard's book was published in the year Margaret Thatcher became leader of the Conservative Party, before the Winter Of Discontent saw rubbish rotting on British streets amid industrial disputes, before greed became nakedly good. But the novel seemed to foresee all that was to come, and the first of the many smart

decisions in this pungent adaptation is to maintain its period setting. It must have been tempting to modernise it. But as ridiculous as the cars, lapels and shagpile sideburns are, retaining the novel's era grants *High-Rise* a compelling air of tragedy. The people in this tower block are buying a bit of the future, but they're never going to escape the past.

Although designed to be exciting and people-friendly, the brutalist architecture of post-War regeneration came to represent ugly failure. *High-Rise* captures the excitement of that sleek, new way of living, and then takes malicious delight in its destruction. This film is both beautiful and grubby; it bathes your eyes but leaves a sticky residue. From the ethereal elegance of an aristocratic French fancy-dress party (costumes wrapped around warped souls), to the lithe musculature of a naked Hiddleston, to the striking image of his paint-splattered face — as if Dulux made an STD commercial — it is crammed with dreamlike (or at times nightmarish) moments. The chilly eroticism is familiar from producer Jeremy Thomas' other Ballard adaptation, *Crash*, but this is more anarchic than Cronenberg's controversial cult classic.

This is a strength and weakness. By staying so faithful to the material, screenwriter Amy Jump and director

Saturday Night Fever III saw Tony Manero change career to estate agent.

Ben Wheatley capture its spirit without quite making *High-Rise* consistently gripping as a story. Once we are firmly established with the concrete erection and its dubious denizens, incident upon incident of unpleasantness pile up to become almost monotonous. But it's hard to know how one could wrestle Ballard's book into a conventional thriller without losing the jagged edge that buries it in the mind. And Wheatley and DP Laurie Rose conjure such restless, arresting images that even if your attention to the plot wanders, you will still want to watch.

Wheatley doesn't allow the larger scale — this must be his biggest-budget picture by millions — to blunt the unpredictability and energy he showed in *Kill List* et al. Hiddleston, highest-profile star yet, manages a very tricky balancing act, as the cool observer drawn deeper — or higher — into mayhem, while Sienna Miller's seductive aide and Luke Evans' bolshy filmmaker are wonderfully unrepentant. This is a dazzling, troubling, ugly and unsettling film. Ballardian, then: fucked up and up and up. **NEV PIERCE**

VERDICT Batshit crazy. Don't expect a thriller in the seat-edge sense, but you will be thrilled — and repulsed — by this bold, faithful adaptation of Ballard's ever-prescient picture of First World strife.



The Ones Below

★★★

OUT MARCH 11 / CERT. 15 / 86 MINS.

DIRECTOR David Farr

CAST Clémence Poésy, David Morrissey, Stephen Campbell Moore

→ Underneath the surface of middle-class comfort and respectability lurk simple base desires: to mate, to protect, to reproduce. They drive theatre director and playwright David Farr's feature-film directorial debut and it's probably reasonable to say that a) he's a fan of the work of Roman Polanski and b) what's wrong with that? A contained four-hander dealing with desire and sanity, it lacks the subtlety to completely get under the skin. But Clémence Poésy excels as a nervous and excited expectant mother dealing with the drama of being a parent — and also growing tensions with her new neighbours. **NP**



Iona

★★★

OUT MARCH 25 / CERT. 15 / 85 MINS.

DIRECTOR Scott Graham

CAST Ruth Negga, Douglas Henshall, Ben Gallagher

→ Fleeing from tragic events on the mainland, struggling single mother Iona (Negga) returns to her rugged Hebridean island birthplace (and namesake), with her 15 year-old son in tow, in Scott Graham's follow-up to his extraordinary debut, *Shell* (2012). Undercurrents and unresolved issues abound in a story told in meaningful glances and innuendo, albeit one with the occasional feel of a sixth-form drama class. A dry-stone wall built by two of the characters provides a potent symbol of the islanders' awkward relationships, and of the film itself: the pieces are there, but the connective tissue is missing. **DH**



The Witch

★★★★★

OUT MARCH 11 / CERT. TBC / 90 MINS.

DIRECTOR Robert Eggers

CAST Anya Taylor-Joy, Ralph Ineson, Kate Dickie, Harvey Scrimshaw

PLOT In their new home, by a wood in 17th-century New England, a God-fearing English family experience a run of tragic misfortune. Is a witch to blame for their woes?



ON PAPER, A HORROR film starring Finchy from *The Office* and a goat called Black Phillip doesn't seem especially promising. But Robert Eggers'

astonishing directorial debut is the kind of horror that favours creeping dread over cheap jump scares. Eggers, whose next film is a *Nosferatu* remake, is one to watch.

The premise is quickly established — devout ex-pat Northerner William (Ralph Ineson — or Finchy if you prefer) and his family (wife, five kids, including newborn baby) are banished from their village for their killjoy religious fervour. They forge a life from the unforgiving land and their menagerie, including the aforementioned intransigent goat Black Phillip. It's tough but manageable, until their baby boy mysteriously disappears. Intriguingly, Eggers shows from the off

that the family is being targeted by a witch but crucially, his characters are kept in the dark. It leaves them grasping at bitter accusations, counter-allegations and hysterical detours into blind faith.

As Eggers escalates the tension, his cast respond admirably. Ineson's guttural Yorkshire snarl has never been better employed, as William finds fault in anyone but himself, while Kate Dickie is typically intense as his grieving wife.

However, it's the newcomers who impress most. Harvey Scrimshaw, as the oldest son, whose awakening sexuality seems to act as a beacon for the witch, gives one of the best child performances in years. But it's Anya Taylor-Joy, as teenage daughter Thomasin, who commands the attention. Marked out as the witch due to an ill-advised remark, she's a blend of disarming guilelessness and wide-eyed innocence, but with a bitter edge that could, in the right light, be mistaken for malevolence.

As this powder keg of a family unit explodes, Eggers displays admirable control. One sequence, in which Eggers and DP Jarin Blaschke hold the shot for what seems like forever, as the witch manifests as a seductress, is unbearably tense. It won't be for everyone — it's slow, the dialogue (recreated from 17th-century transcripts) is occasionally impenetrable, and gorehounds will be disappointed. But rarely has a film this oppressive been so impressive. **CHRIS HEWITT**

VERDICT A hugely assured debut, *The Witch* is a beautiful, bleak brainworm that will haunt you for days.

Gordon Ramsay's new gaff wouldn't be to everyone's taste.



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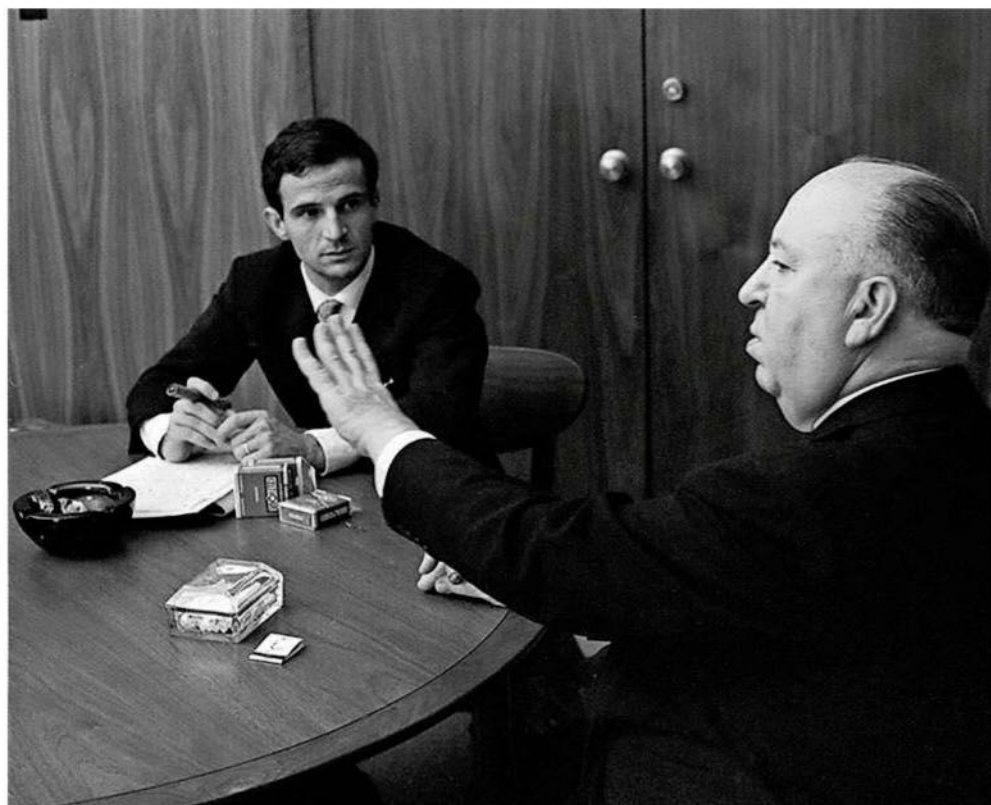
★★★★★

OUT MARCH 4 / CERT. TBC / 80 MINS.

DIRECTOR Kent Jones

CAST Martin Scorsese, David Fincher, Wes Anderson, Richard Linklater

PLOT A documentary exploring the legendary interview between critic-turned-filmmaker François Truffaut and his idol Alfred Hitchcock that formed the basis of seminal book *Hitchcock/Truffaut*.



Truffaut and Hitch share cinema secrets. Plate of Hobnobs and unworkable coffee-pot thing just out of shot.

IN 1962, THE 30 YEAR-old François Truffaut, a leading light in the French New Wave, and the 63 year-old Alfred Hitchcock, the Master Of Suspense, met for a book-length interview that formed the basis of one of film literature's key works, *Hitchcock/Truffaut* (if it were done today, it would be a Google Hangout). Kent Jones' documentary, following his previous films about Val Lewton and Elia Kazan, charts the conversation and matters arising. Smartly illustrated by a canny choice of great clips, the result is a cinephile's dream.

Narrated by Bob Balaban — Truffaut's sidekick in *Close Encounters* — the film falls into three sections. The first tells the story of the interview itself, an eight-day marathon tête-à-tête at Universal Studios using audio tape punctuated by pictures. Hitchcock spoke no French so Truffaut's colleague Helen Scott does a nimble job

of translating and remains the unsung hero of the whole enterprise. What's delightful here is Truffaut's fanboyish enthusiasm quizzing Hitchcock on his his ideal of "pure cinema" and wheedling out some tricks of the trade (in *Suspicion*, Hitch put a light bulb in milk to make it glow). The men share traits — in a pre-DVD/internet age both men have a ridiculous ability to recall single shots and moments — but Jones makes clear the differences. While Hitchcock jokes about his father having him arrested and locked up in jail for a gag (spawning the director's lifelong distrust of the police), the young Truffaut was actually put in jail for truancy and theft, never knowing a compassionate father figure.

Truffaut's intention in writing the book was to elevate the reputation of Hitchcock from pure entertainer into true artist. To explore this theme, Jones wheels in big guns as back up. Martin Scorsese, David Fincher (who calls *Vertigo* "so perverted"), Wes Anderson

and Richard Linklater all line up to elucidate on his work and influence. The third section takes us deeper into Hitchcock's filmography and, while it is always a privilege to listen to Scorsese talk about *Psycho* and *Vertigo*, it feels like a step into a different documentary.

Taking its cue from the book, the film feels biased towards Hitchcock over Truffaut, and for all its talk of "pure cinema" it is very much a standard talking-heads documentary. But what courses through every frame is a love of movies and their head-spinning, heart-stopping power and possibilities. If you love Hitchcock already, *Hitchcock/Truffaut* will give you new food for thought and a hungry desire to return to the movies. And, if you have yet to discover the director, man, are you in for a treat. **IAN FREER**

VERDICT A landmark film book gets its just deserts. The cleverly curated clips are stunning and the analysis thought-provoking in this richly rewarding piece.

The Pearl Button

★★★

OUT MARCH 18 / CERT. TBC / 82 MINS.

DIRECTOR Patricio Guzmán

CAST Martin G. Calderon, Gabriela Paterito, Emma Malig, Gabriel Salazar

→ This companion documentary to the director's *Nostalgia For The Light* contrasts the 19th-century cleansing of Chile's indigenous tribes with the brutal Pinochet regime. But while the visuals are striking, the poetic musings of Patricio Guzmán's voiceover undermine his political fury. **DP**

Norm Of The North

★

OUT MARCH 18 / CERT. U / 90 MINS.

DIRECTOR Trevor Wall

CAST (VOICES) Rob Schneider, Heather Graham, Ken Jeong, Bill Nighy

→ This charmless tale is committed to 'wacky' humour, with Rob Schneider voicing a chatty polar bear out to save his Arctic home. Mild gross-out gags and a chattering chorus of lemmings make it a chore for anyone over three. Even David Attenborough would call for a cull. **JW**

Next To Her

★★★★

OUT MARCH 11 / CERT. TBC / 90 MINS.

DIRECTOR Asaf Korman

CAST Liron Ben-Shlush, Dana Ivgy, Yaakov Zada Daniel, Sophia Ostrisky

→ A sensitive but unsettling Israeli drama about the relationship between a Haifa security guard and a sister with learning difficulties. Superbly played by Liron Ben-Shlush and Dana Ivgy, this thoughtful study of love and control only falters with its melodramatic resolution. **DP**

ALSO
OUT



Risen

★★★

OUT MARCH 18 / CERT. 12A / 107 MINS.

DIRECTOR Kevin Reynolds

CAST Joseph Fiennes, Tom Felton, Peter Firth, Cliff Curtis

PLOT Jerusalem, AD 33. Easter (although no-one knows that yet). When the body of Yeshua (Curtis) goes missing, Clavius (Fiennes) must find it before it's claimed he's been resurrected.

B

IBLICAL FILMS are surprisingly big business. And they don't necessarily need Mel Gibson to succeed — 2014's *Heaven Is For*

Real made \$91 million in the US on a \$12 million budget. If you haven't heard of it, it's because not all of them are released in the UK.

And so to *Risen*, a New Testament-era mystery from the man who directed *Robin Hood: Prince Of Thieves* and *Waterworld* — an intriguing premise, if not exactly one it's easy to be entirely confident about. Initially pitched as an unofficial sequel to 2004's *The Passion Of The Christ*, the story actually begins with Yeshua (you'll know him better as Jesus) still on the cross, mid-crucifixion. He doesn't last long, however — his heart pierced by a spear as an act of "mercy",

his body placed in a tomb protected by round-the-clock guards.

These guards are important for Jerusalem's ruler, Pontius Pilate (Peter Firth) — he needs to quell rumours Yeshua is the Messiah. If the body is taken, it can't be presented to the crowds as proof he hasn't been resurrected. So when the body does disappear, his right-hand man Clavius (Joseph Fiennes) is under strict orders to find it and get it back fast, before it rots beyond all recognition and the story gains traction.

This is where the film is at its best. Clavius is a man plagued by his inept soldiers, disruptive locals and a continuity-defying cut on his lip, and his investigations around Jerusalem pitch him as a Biblical-era Columbo — we're in on what's really going on (Christ has risen), but he's yet to discover the truth.

And then he does, with about 40 minutes to go. And you (most likely) know the drill from here — apostles, Galilee, ascension to Heaven. There's a decent action scene as the disciples try to avoid capture in the desert, but from hereon out it feels like a Christian TV channel's Sunday matinée. And when was the last time you spent any time in the company of one of those? **JONATHAN PILE**

VERDICT It has its moments, but it blows the interesting premise — the resurrection of Jesus told as a mystery — too early for an overlong, overly religious finale.

Joseph Fiennes
— like Jesus,
he is returned!



How To Be Single

★★★

OUT NOW / CERT. 15 / 110 MINS.

DIRECTOR Christian Ditter

CAST Dakota Johnson, Leslie Mann, Rebel Wilson

→ Newly single Alice (Johnson) hits the Manhattan bar scene with her broody sister (Mann) and party girl pal (Wilson). This zippy comedy based on Liz Tuccillo's book is crowded with characters and conflicting messages about gender and relationship etiquette — it's easy to spot the influence of both male and female screenwriters. But it taps into a few realistic dating dilemmas and for every cliché there's a sharp, silly improvised aside from Wilson in a sexed-up version of her *Pitch Perfect* persona. With its themes and locations, cocktails and heels, this is giddy, glamorous catnip for *Sex And The City* fans. **ALS**



Rock The Kasbah

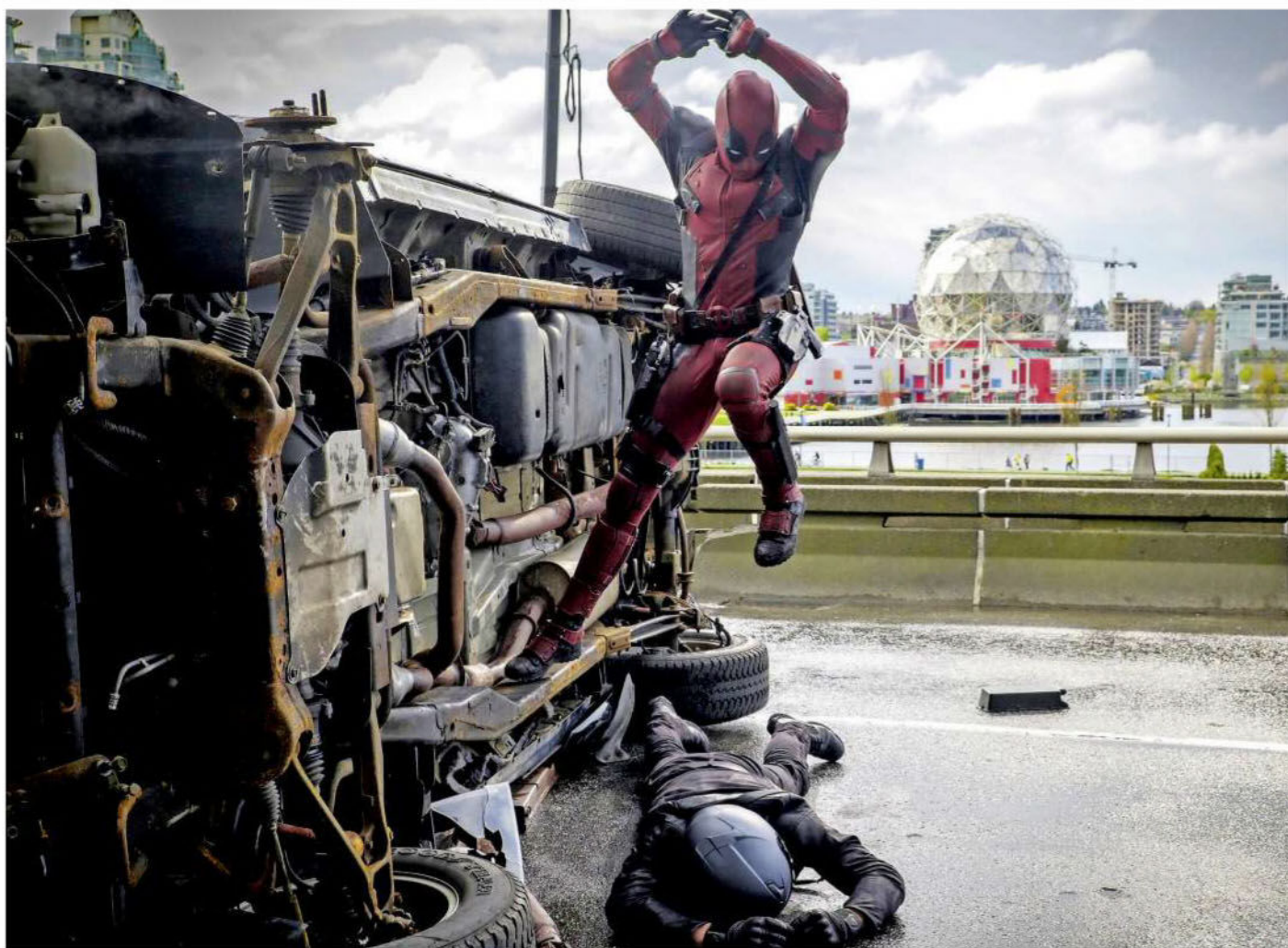
★

OUT MARCH 18 / CERT. TBC / 106 MINS.

DIRECTOR Barry Levinson

CAST Bill Murray, Kate Hudson, Zoey Deschanel, Bruce Willis, Leem Lubany

→ This was savaged on its Stateside release, and with justification. Washed-up music promoter Richie (Murray) heads to Afghanistan and gets caught up in tribal feuding before eventually sending a local girl (Lubany) onto the country's version of *Pop Idol*. But it's clueless as to what it wants to be. A biting satire of the War On Terror's weird cocktails-'n'-arms-deals fringe would need some decent jokes, while an uplifting tale of a girl overcoming her clan's conservative patriarchy would need to pay more than just lip service to her character. On paper, this sounds like a winner; as it stands, it's a waste of time for all involved. **AL**



Deadpool

★★★

OUT NOW / CERT. 15 / 108 MINS.

DIRECTOR Tim Miller

CAST Ryan Reynolds, Morena Baccarin, Ed Skrein, Gina Carano

PLOT Riddled with cancer, special forces operative-turned-mercenary Wade Wilson (Reynolds) tries a radical treatment with a useful side effect: regenerative powers. And a bad one: severe disfigurement.

WE HAVE, OF COURSE, met Ryan Reynolds as Deadpool before — scrapping with Hugh Jackman's Wolverine, retractable swords melded into his arms and, in a leftfield creative decision, his mouth sewn shut. The "Merc With A Mouth" reduced to simply the merc, his reason for being taken from him, the character rendered impotent.

This Deadpool is different (and more like the comics) — talkative, quick-witted

(if knob gags can be classed as wit) and with a fondness for breaking the fourth wall. The film's set in the same universe as the X-Men franchise, but has an anarchic spirit that sticks a middle finger up to Bryan Singer's oh-so-serious sensibilities. And smirks to itself as it does so.

The film starts with Wade Wilson already having chosen his super-name, in costume and midway through a scrap on a freeway. That's interspersed with flashbacks showing him pre-disfiguring mutation, falling in love, being diagnosed with terminal cancer, through to being tortured by Ed Skrein's main antagonist Ajax (named after the cleaning product). It's a smart structure, one that neatly sidesteps the major issue with origin stories: the suited-up main attraction being absent for the first hour.

In this case, because you don't have time to dwell on it as it's playing out before you, it also disguises how slight the main mission is (a fight, a kidnapping, a rescue attempt, roll credits). But Deadpool is a perfect example of a character who doesn't need world-threatening danger to foil. Wolverine or Superman require something interesting to do — for the most part, what Deadpool is up to is less important than the quips he makes as he's doing it. Of course, that means

He would not borrow the jack without asking again.

those quips had better be good.

And this is where the film isn't entirely successful. It's at its best in its moments of meta-humour — Deadpool wondering whether it'll be James McAvoy or Patrick Stewart in charge at the X-Mansion, or bemoaning the budgetary reasons that mean the only two X-Men he ever gets to actually meet are metallic giant Colossus (Stefan Kapicic) and sullen youngster Negasonic Teenage Warhead (Brianna Hildebrand). But its comedic currency tends to the less cerebral, and your reaction to the relentless stream of jokes about masturbation and oral sex will depend how high *Van Wilder: Party Liaison* is on your list of favourite Ryan Reynolds films. (The closer to the top, the better, naturally.)

With comic-book films currently so popular, and after *Green Lantern* failed to ignite a franchise for him, it's obvious why Ryan Reynolds has tried again. But in such a crowded market, the question is whether Deadpool can make his smutty voice heard. **JONATHAN PILE**

VERDICT The sheer number of dick jokes waved in your face will soon numb you to their impact, but this is a fun, if patchy, alternative to the current glut of 'the world is about to end unless we do something' comic-book films.

Dad's Army

★★★

OUT NOW / CERT. PG / 100 MINS.

DIRECTOR Oliver Parker

CAST Toby Jones, Bill Nighy, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Michael Gambon, Blake Harrison

PLOT Walmington-On-Sea, 1944. With Allied forces poised to invade Nazi-held France, the fate of the world lies in the hands of a Home Guard unit filled with cretins. Don't panic!



VER NINE YEARS' worth of *Dad's Army* episodes, Captain Mainwaring attempted to turn a bunch of fools, kooks and geriatrics

into a deadly fighting unit. Oliver Parker, director of the unlikely new reboot, faced an even more formidable task. How to handle a brand viewed by many as fuddy-duddy, and by fans as untouchable?

Rather than reinvent the roles, Parker and his team cast stars who closely resemble the original ensemble. Several of the picks are inspired. Toby Jones tones down Mainwaring's meanness and plays up the physical comedy, displaying a hitherto untapped aptitude for chalkboard-based slapstick. Blake Harrison, famous for playing a different stupid boy in *The Inbetweeners*,

has a ball as iconic twit Pike. And Michael Gambon is perfect as Godfrey, wafting through scenes with an air of befuddled geniality. Other performances are less impressive: Tom Courtenay in particular is weirdly muted as Jones, as if he realised he had no chance of matching the bellicose-goose antics of his predecessor, Clive Dunn.

As for the plot, it's moderately entertaining bunkum about a Nazi spy, whose identity is revealed very early on, but really amounts to little more than an excuse to have the whole cast moon over Catherine Zeta-Jones' vixenish journalist. That aspect was clearly inspired by classic series four episode *Mum's Army* from 1970, down to some funny business involving Mainwaring's spectacles, but the entire thing is studded with references. Some are subtle (a line about weaponised black pepper), some very much not (most of

Fools, kooks and geriatrics: Captain Mainwaring (Toby Jones) and the gang.

the catchphrases are inelegantly wheeled out). Screenwriter Hamish McColl does his best work with the fraught relationship between the puffed-up Mainwaring and his upper-class underling Wilson (Bill Nighy). "It has been a bit lax," says the latter in one scene. "No need for Latin here, Wilson," huffs his commander in response.

But despite a smattering of sharp lines and nice moments, as a whole it's an inessential oddity — amiable enough but also over-reverential and unlikely to leave a lasting impression. And with nothing more edgy than innuendo involving roly-poly pudding, its best chance of success is probably with older audiences. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

VERDICT It has a strong, game cast but this is karaoke filmmaking, trading on nostalgia rather than breaking new territory. Affable but forgettable.

Time Out Of Mind

★★★

OUT MARCH 4 / CERT. 15 / 116 MINS.

DIRECTOR Oren Moverman

CAST Richard Gere, Jena Malone

→ Gere stars as an itinerant adrift in New York in this sensitively written and imaginatively directed tale, though one which meanders as he ambles from street corner to shelter. It's a well-intentioned but ultimately insipid film, adding little to the subgenre besides Gere's careworn face and carelessly razored hair. **DH**

The Here After

★★★★

OUT MARCH 11 / CERT. 15 / 102 MINS.

DIRECTOR Magnus von Horn

CAST Ulrik Munther, Mats Blomgren, Alexander Nordgren, Wieslaw Komasa

→ This simmering fact-based drama revolves around a potent display of psychological anguish from Swedish pop star Ulrik Munther as a teenager returning to the rural community where a sickening crime has made him a pariah. Chillingly calculated and quietly compelling. **PP**

Goodnight Mommy

★★★★

OUT MARCH 4 / CERT. TBC / 99 MINS.

DIRECTORS Veronika Franz, Severin Fiala

CAST Susanne Wuest, Elias Schwarz, Lukas Schwarz

→ The mother of identical twins is increasingly unnerved by her sons' behaviour in this artful, creepy Austrian horror. Is she an impostor, as they claim, or is something far stranger going on? It keeps us guessing, right up until its tense, nasty reveal. **DW**

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Zootropolis

★★★★★

OUT MARCH 25 / CERT. TBC / 108 MINS.

DIRECTORS Byron Howard, Rich Moore
CAST Jason Bateman, Ginnifer Goodwin, Idris Elba, Alan Tudyk, J. K. Simmons

PLOT In the mammal city of Zootropolis, rabbit rookie cop Judy Hopps (Goodwin) is forced to team up with fox Nick Wilde (Bateman) when civilised animals start turning savage.



IN THE FURRY FACE of it, *Zootropolis* sees Walt Disney Animation Studios on safe ground. This is the Disney of *Robin Hood* and *Mickey*

Mouse — cute, anthropomorphised animals, walking on hind legs, talking up cosy platitudes. A familiar formula ready to delight pre-teens and be packaged for enthusiastic toy merchandisers.

But *Zootropolis* has more in common with Pixar than it first appears. The fictional universe it presents — a human-free world where mammals have evolved into a bustling, civilised society — is vividly realised, richly detailed and very funny.

Our guide through this world is Judy Hopps (voiced by Ginnifer Goodwin), a bunny cop in a buddy-cop movie, paired with a mismatched partner — a fox. Hopps is very much a Disney heroine for a post-

Frozen world — peppy and independently minded. Despite the urges of her carrot-farming parents to give up her dreams, she becomes Zootropolis' first rabbit police officer. Her partner, Nick Wilde, is a wily hustler played with sarcastic relish by Jason Bateman. In the wild, they're enemies; here they form an uneasy partnership as they're both assigned to a missing-animals case.

In the grand tradition of the genre, the mismatched pair gradually learn to get along. What they uncover — a this-goes-all-the-way-to-the-top conspiracy — raises questions over what it means to evolve past your biology; in a city where former bestial foes share an uncomfortable truce, it serves as a smart analogy for the debates on immigration that rage in our human world. It's not a domain into which you often see Disney venture.

Of course, political metaphors will bypass the youngsters and yet the twisty machinations of the noir-lite story sometimes get lost among the furry shenanigans. This means, for adults, the joy is often to be found in the background: beavers as construction workers; sloths working the desks at the Department Of Motor Vehicles; Shakira as a gazelle. But it remains entertaining throughout — a testament to the inventiveness of the on-screen action. And Pixar's influence. **JOHN NUGENT**

VERDICT The latest creative renaissance of the house that Walt built (but Pixar reinvigorated) shows no sign of slowing. An engaging animation for all ages.

Oh, so *that's* what the fox had to say.



Mojave

★

OUT MARCH 25 / CERT. 15 / 91 MINS.

DIRECTOR William Monahan

CAST Oscar Isaac, Garrett Hedlund, Mark Wahlberg

→ *Mojave* has a decent cast, but they're lumbered with a largely nonsensical plot in which a filmmaker suffering a crisis of confidence (Hedlund) meets a dangerous drifter (Isaac) while on a desert walkabout. Is he the devil? Or perhaps a Tyler Durden-esque alter ego? With all the existential noodling and pretentious dialogue assaulting you, you'll struggle to care. William Monahan won an Oscar for writing *The Departed*, but after this and 2010's misjudged gangland caper *London Boulevard*, perhaps he should refocus on his screenplays and leave the directing duties to somebody else. **DH**



Welcome To Me

★★★

OUT MARCH 25 / CERT. TBC / 87 MINS.

DIRECTOR Shira Piven

CAST Kristen Wiig, James Marsden, Linda Cardellini, Wes Bentley

→ When Alice Klieg (Wiig) — an infomercial and Oprah fanatic with a borderline personality disorder — wins \$86 million on the lottery, she moves and pays the enterprising owner of a TV studio (Marsden) over the odds to produce a talk show devoted to her life. It's a delicious trainwreck — there are re-enactments of her most painful childhood memories and cooking demos including meatloaf cake with potato frosting — and Wiig's Alice is thoughtful, unpredictable and funny. The problem is, there's not a great deal of depth to the piece, and the supporting cast are entirely wasted. **KP**



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The Club

★★★★

OUT MARCH 25 / CERT. TBC / 98 MINS.

DIRECTOR Pablo Larraín

CAST Roberto Fariás, Antonia Zegers, Marcelo Alonso, Alfredo Castro

→ A powerful companion piece to *Spotlight*, Pablo Larraín's drama (his first film since the Oscar-nominated *No*) addresses the abuses and violations of a group of exiled Chilean priests, and the Catholic church at large, with an unsparing eye and dark wit. This small band of lost souls don't make up for their sins in church but in a bleak beachhouse where they're looked after by a fussing ex-nun (Antonia Zegers). There to be kept out of sight and mind, that ends when a moment of violence delivers a Vatican investigator (Marcelo Alonso) to their doorstep — a stinging metaphor for a church that's roused to act only when it has face to save. Larraín, who draws the best from his veteran cast, is a director to watch. **PDS**



Disorder

★★★★

OUT MARCH 25 / CERT. 15 / 98 MINS.

DIRECTOR Alice Winocour

CAST Matthias Schoenaerts, Diane Kruger, Paul Hamy

→ Vincent (Matthias Schoenaerts), invalidated out of the French army with PTSD, takes a job as bodyguard to the wife (Diane Kruger) and son of an arms dealer. While the shady businessman is away, Vincent becomes convinced his clients are in danger and prepares to fight for them. Alice Winocour's simmering thriller/character study is like a *Transporter* movie directed by Chantal Akerman, with superb work from Schoenaerts as a buttoned-down, paranoid ex-soldier who senses evil forces in every shadow... but, despite all his issues, just might turn out to be right. Psychologically acute without the need for Oscar-baiting self-pitying speeches, it's also terrifically suspenseful with a provocative punchline. **KN**



Kung Fu Panda 3

★★★★

OUT MARCH 11 / CERT. PG / 95 MINS.

DIRECTORS Jennifer Yuh Nelson, Alessandro Carloni

CAST Jack Black, Angelina Jolie, Bryan Cranston, J. K. Simmons, Dustin Hoffman, Jackie Chan

→ This megabucks trilogy ends winningly with an instalment that sticks with the overarching theme of being true to oneself, particularly when kicking ass. But it also finds enough ideas to differentiate it from the first two. Po (Jack Black) has been tracked down by his long-lost father (Bryan Cranston) — great news if it weren't for the god-like warrior who has come from the spirit realm to destroy every kung fu master around. Although there is now a huge number of characters on screen, and expensive household names voicing them, everyone gets something worthwhile to do. The production design is gorgeous and there's confidence in the swift, cheerful storytelling which, lacking the darkness of the last film, allows for silly incidental moments. Enjoyably wise and daft. **OR**



Truth

★★

OUT MARCH 4 / CERT. 15 / 125 MINS.

DIRECTOR James Vanderbilt

CAST Cate Blanchett, Robert Redford, Dennis Quaid, Topher Grace, Elisabeth Moss, Bruce Greenwood, Stacy Keach, Dermot Mulroney

→ If last month's *Spotlight* showed us what great journalism can achieve, *Truth* is a counterpoint demonstrating the pitfalls that the modern profession faces. Blanchett is prickly *60 Minutes* news producer Mary Mapes, a protégée of legendary anchorman Dan Rather (Robert Redford). In the run-up to the 2004 election she finds evidence that George W. Bush may have skipped part of his National Guard service, and rushes the story to the screen at the network's behest. But her sources are shaky and Mapes' career comes under threat. The film asks some valuable questions, and the performances are as good as one would expect of this cast, but ironically it fails to really interrogate its own source (Mapes' account), making it a one-dimensional affair. **HOH**

DID YOU KNOW?

In addition to voicing the villainous Kai in *Kung Fu Panda 3*, J. K. Simmons also voiced the yellow M&M in a series of ads.



DID YOU KNOW?

Cate Blanchett is the only actor to earn an Oscar for playing an Oscar-winner — Katharine Hepburn in *The Aviator*.





Anomalisa



OUT MARCH 11 / CERT. 15 / 90 MINS.

DIRECTORS Charlie Kaufman, Duke Johnson

CAST (VOICES) David Thewlis, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Tom Noonan

PLOT Motivational speaker Michael Stone (Thewlis) checks into a Cincinnati hotel. After his business-trip rituals and a heated run-in with an ex, his half-drunk ennui increases. Enter Leigh's Lisa.



HERE ARE 1,070 "special thanks" credits at the end of *Anomalisa*. Charlie Kaufman and Duke Johnson's mini-masterpiece started

life as a one-act Kaufman entry in a Carter Burwell sound-play experiment (whatever that is) and it took Kickstarter to get it to the screen. Happily, *Anomalisa* has made all those other Kickstarter requests bearable. It is a minor miracle

of a movie, the most beautiful, haunting, empathetic, tender, funny 90 minutes of the year so far. Whether those 1,070 people donated a lot or a little, thank you.

On paper, it doesn't sound hopeful. This is a stop-motion character study of Michael Stone, a demotivated motivational speaker voiced by David Thewlis on a go-slow. It gets weirder. The puppets have clip-on faces (you can see the joins) with pudgy bodies (hidden by baggy clothes) and fuzzy skin. The only other actors are Jennifer Jason Leigh and Tom Noonan. The latter voices pretty much all of the characters, be it cabby, wife, dumped ex-girlfriend or bellhop. This is because Michael's jaundiced worldview means everyone sounds very much the same as anyone else.

But out of such unpromising ingredients Kaufman and fellow director Duke Johnson (who was responsible for *Community*'s stop-motion Christmas episode) wring melancholy magic. After a minutely observed, dark depiction of aircraft and taxi chit-chat, bleak hotel downtime and a failed attempt to reignite relations with an old flame, there is light. Michael meets Lisa (Leigh), a groupie attending his talk, and boom! The pair forge a connection. Lisa's lightness lifts Michael from his despair and the pair connect over their insecurities and missed

Rodney Trotter was having second thoughts about this *Wallace & Gromit* cameo.

opportunities. There is puppet sex — happily at the other end of the scale from the ridiculous vision in *Team America* — and there is singing: Lisa's heart-breaking rendition of Cyndi Lauper's *Girls Just Want To Have Fun* will leave you in pieces.

As you'd expect from Kaufman, the writing delivers flawed, lonely people who you desperately hope will find happiness together. As Michael and Lisa's relationship crescendos, the film enters a *Being John Malkovich* zone of madness. That Michael has checked into the Fregoli hotel is pertinent here: the 'Fregoli delusion' is a paranoid disorder where the sufferer believes different people are actually one single person out to get them but assuming multiple personalities.

You'd be right to expect that, given Kaufman's history of surreal twists and unlikely storytelling, it isn't likely to end well or in any sort of obvious manner (an ancient Japanese sex toy is involved). But what stays with you isn't the puppetry or point-making about the corrosion of individuality in the modern world. Instead it's the poignant consideration of just how fragile we all are. **IAN FREEER**

VERDICT *Anomalisa* has more heart, soul and pathos than 99.9 per cent of live-action movies. The best hotel-set love story since *Lost In Translation*.



Zoolander 2

★★★

OUT NOW / CERT. 12A / 102 MINS.

DIRECTOR Ben Stiller

CAST Ben Stiller, Owen Wilson, Penélope Cruz, Will Ferrell

PLOT Someone is killing the most beautiful pop stars in the world. The only person who can help Interpol find out why is, surprisingly, retired male model Derek Zoolander (Stiller).



IT'S 15 YEARS since *Zoolander* first sashayed into cinemas, dying on initial release but gradually building a devoted following. The sequel sticks to the formula that (eventually) worked last time. Like its predecessor, *Zoolander 2* is stitched together from some teeny scraps of plot, studded with a few really smart jokes and a lot of very stupid ones, then heavily studded with dazzling star cameos. It's a likable mess, although it lacks the memorable lines of the first, making it liable to be enjoyed once then forgotten, rather than revisited for years to come.

It begins with both Derek Zoolander (Ben Stiller) and Hans (Owen Wilson) in hiding. Derek because he caused the death of his wife and lost his son, Hans because he slightly grazed his cheekbone in an

accident and won't let the world witness his new hideousness. The pair are separately invited to Rome for some big fashion hoo-hah and are then snagged by Interpol to help foil a criminal plot of quite astonishingly complex absurdity, involving the Garden Of Eden and a cabal of warrior pop stars.

There is a sneaking sense the script was written to accommodate small windows of cast availability, as most of them don't hang around for very long. Kristen Wiig, whom trailers had suggested might be the main villain, is barely in it — which is a shame because when she does show up, as a fish-lipped designer with an accent that assigns vowels at random, she's a strange treasure. Will Ferrell, returning as murderous lunatic Mugatu, is enjoyable but also frequently absent. That makes it all a bit of a chaotic hodge-podge, trying to mask the lack of consistent characters by throwing great gleaming fistfuls of cameos at you. There are so many guest appearances, possibly over a hundred. Some are well used (Susan Boyle is hilarious), but a lot of them work on the basis that recognising a famous person constitutes a joke in itself. Katy Perry singing on a roof is not a punchline — it's just Katy Perry singing on a roof.

Yet the whole thing is so ridiculous, and so enthusiastic, that it wins you over. *Zoolander 2* is as endearingly brainless as its title character. **OLLY RICHARDS**

VERDICT Cut from the same cloth as the first, but fewer of the jokes land. Still fun, but *Zoolander's* retirement should probably now be permanent.

Ben, Owen and Penélope: so hot right now.

AT A GLANCE



Kung Fu Panda 3

OUT NOW

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Deadpool ★★★★★	p.49
How To Be Single ★★★★★	p.48
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Zootropolis ★★★★★	p.52

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**CAPTAIN AMERICA:
CIVIL WAR SPECIAL**

AMERICAN IDOL

**WHY A PATRIOTIC FIGURE CREATED
TO BASH NAZIS IN 1940 REMAINS
ONE OF MARVEL'S MOST
INTERESTING HEROES**

WORDS DORIAN LYNKEY
ILLUSTRATION JOHN ROYLE



THE AMERICAN NIGHTMARE IS A 1990 STORY IN WHICH CAPTAIN AMERICA TEAMS

up with Daredevil to protect a smalltown inventor from the FBI and government goons. Voicing the opinions of *Daredevil's* unapologetically liberal writer Ann Nocenti, he opened his heart to the Man Without Fear about the sins of Reagan and Bush's America and fretted, "How can they expect me to continue to wear the flag of a country that does such things?" Even Daredevil was taken aback. One reader was so unhappy with this bleeding-heart Cap that he sent a curt letter to the editor: "Get the commie off the book."

People take Captain America very seriously. In 2007, writer Ed Brubaker said, "What I found is that all the really hardcore left-wing fans want Cap to be giving speeches on the street corner against the George W. Bush administration, and all the really right-wing fans want him to be over in the streets of Baghdad, punching out Saddam Hussein." This divide wasn't new. The 75-year history of the character is an argument about America itself. Over the years, Captain America has been a clean-cut war hero, a Red-basher, a bitterly disillusioned liberal, a jingoistic thug and a dissident freedom fighter, and he still hasn't been nailed down. Like the country he represents, he contains multitudes.

By rights, a square-jawed all-American who was created in December 1940 to battle the Nazis should by now be hopelessly square. He's not anxious about girls and money like Spider-Man, tortured by grief and guilt like Daredevil, hounded like the X-Men or lonely like the Hulk. He's a good guy, and good guys normally write white. But the writers who have kept him alive in comic books and, recently, on screen show that it's not easy to be good when you represent a country that frequently isn't. His faith in America, and therefore his own identity, is constantly being knocked down and rebuilt. It was all much simpler in the beginning, when the USA was the hero of the free world, the enemy was obvious and Cap was a fantasy of underdog empowerment cooked up by two Jewish New Yorkers.



In 1940, Martin Goodman was the ambitious boss of Timely Publications, the precursor to Marvel Comics. His biggest characters, the Human Torch and the Sub-Mariner, were licensed from another company and he wanted one of his own. So he asked freelance writer Joe Simon, who asked a talented young artist from the Lower East Side slums named Jacob Kurtzberg, better known as Jack Kirby. Simon and Kirby struck out a few times before creating a super-patriot heavily influenced by MLJ Comics' star-spangled hero The Shield. He was Steve Rogers, an orphaned, working-class, Irish-American art student from Kirby's neighbourhood who was too sickly to enlist in the military and so volunteered to receive an experimental "super-soldier" serum that enabled him to fight for the American way. Simon toyed with



Clockwise from top: Hitler on the cover of *Captain America* #1 (cover date: March 1941); Issue 109, January 1969, in which Cap reveals how he came to be; The inventor of the Super-Soldier Serum with his charge; A flashback to Cap during World War II in *The Ultimates* #1 (March 2002) — note Bucky, bottom right; Cap creators Jack Kirby and Joe Simon. Right: Cap and sidekick Rick Jones (during a brief stint as Bucky) attack Hydra in issue #113, May 1969.

• COURTESY OF MARVEL, THE JOE SIMON ESTATE AND THE JACK KIRBY ESTATE



the name Super American before settling on Captain America. "There were too many 'Supers' around," Simon remembered. "There weren't a lot of captains in comics."

Simon, Kirby and Goodman were all sons of immigrants; they didn't take America for granted. What's more, Simon and Kirby were genuinely disgusted by Hitler and made their hero an idealistic, socially conscious patriot who went to war to protect the weak. As Mark D. White puts it in *The Virtues Of Captain America: Modern-Day Lessons On Character From A World War II Superhero*, he believes "American ideals apply to everyone — not just all Americans, but all people around the world".

The US wouldn't enter the war until Pearl Harbour in December 1941, but Timely's heroes were already doing their bit. The cover of *Captain America* #1, which hit the newsstands shortly before Christmas 1940 (although sporting a cover date of March 1941), depicted Cap whomping Hitler himself while Nazi bullets pinged off his shield. The scenes in *Captain America: The First Avenger* in which he's forced to be a propaganda pin-up echo the inspirational impact of the comic book. Each issue sold around one million copies, outperforming even *Time* magazine, fans called themselves the Sentinels Of Liberty, and Cap continued to plague the Nazis and Japanese right up to VJ Day. "The villain came first," Simon said. "Hitler was the perfect bad guy — better than any we could have invented. Captain America was created to be his ultimate foil."

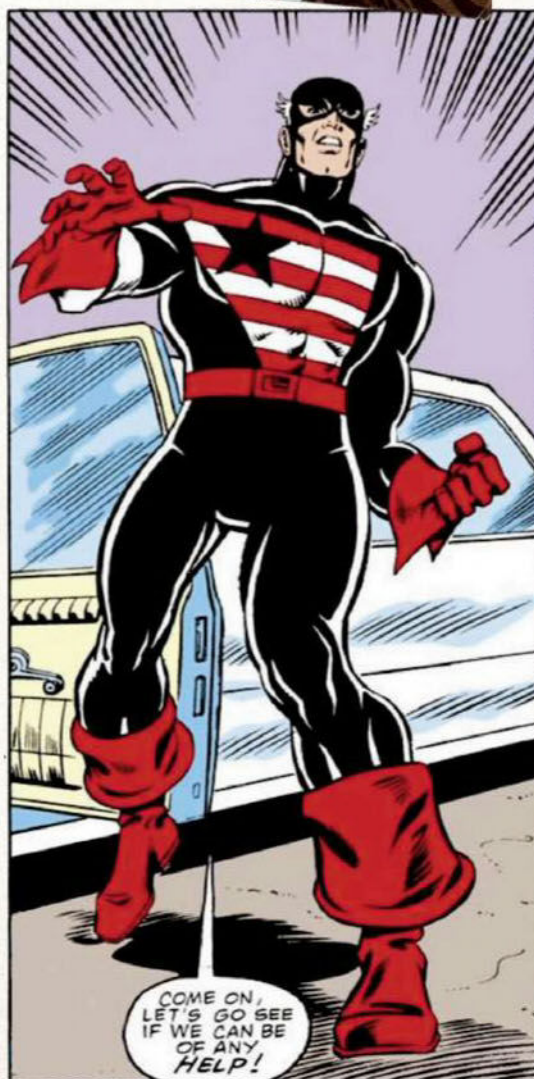


Goodman was not quite so idealistic when he revived the character as a Cold Warrior in 1953, at the height of the Red Scare, billing him as "Captain America, Commie Smasher!" When Stan Lee, the former Timely office boy who became the creative dynamo behind Marvel, brought Cap back in 1964, he ignored those stories, explaining that Rogers had been frozen in North Atlantic ice since 1945 and defrosted in a new era. When *Howard The Duck* creator Steve Gerber attended a pitch meeting with TV producer Fred Silverman in 1980, he waxed lyrical about Captain America, calling him "a man out of time". An unimpressed Silverman replied, "You know, we ain't doing Ibsen here." But this out-of-time quality is what makes Rogers so interesting in the Avengers movies, his old-fashioned nobility contrasting with Iron Man's glib cynicism and Black Widow's flinty realism. He doesn't quite fit in.

After a strong start, the reborn Captain America became unfashionable as the '60s wore on. What did good ol' Steve Rogers have to say to the generation of Woodstock and My Lai, increasingly convinced that the biggest threat to American ideals was the country's own government? "It was taking place during the Vietnam War, and here was this guy wearing a flag on his chest, and everybody was embarrassed," said writer Steve Englehart, who took over the book in 1972.

One of Englehart's storylines was an obvious analogy for Watergate, with Cap the victim of a smear campaign orchestrated by Number One, the leader of terrorist organisation the Secret Empire. It ends with Number One unmasked as a top government official and committing suicide in the White House. Englehart assured Marvel that Number One, whose face was never seen, wasn't meant to be Richard Nixon, but of course he was. Why else would he boast, "High political office didn't satisfy me! My power was still too constrained by legalities!"? And who would feel more betrayed by a crooked commander-in-chief than the war hero who wore the flag on his chest?

Rogers was so disillusioned that he renounced Captain



Top left: Steve Rogers' first appearance as Nomad in *Captain America* #180 (December 1974).

Left: Mark Gruenwald's retired Rogers returns as 'The Captain' in #337 (January 1988).

Above and right: The death of Captain America, as depicted in Mark Millar's *Civil War* (2007).



America and fought crime as Nomad before picking up the shield again, deciding that defending his country didn't mean obeying his government. Englehart's work later influenced *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, the Russo brothers' homage to the trust-nobody paranoid thrillers of the 1970s.

During the Reaganite '80s, Cap was a wary patriot, conscious of America's flaws as well as its strengths, suspicious of power, battling shady generals and renegade CIA agents. Writer Mark Gruenwald had Rogers temporarily resign again after he was ordered to work directly for the government, which replaced him with the more pliable Super-Patriot. "I cannot represent the American government; the President does that," Rogers loftily proclaimed. "I must represent the American people. I represent the American Dream..." In a deleted scene from *Avengers Assemble*, Joss Whedon referenced this sceptical incarnation of Captain America (his favourite Avenger), having him talk to old flame Peggy Carter about "loss of the idea of community, loss of health care and welfare and all sorts of things."

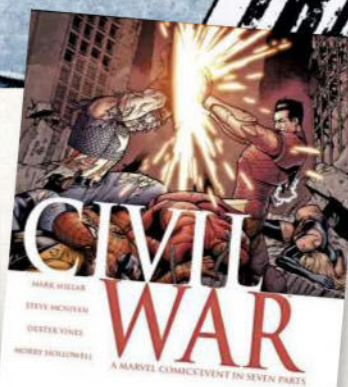
There were limits, though. In 1984 left-leaning writer J. M. DeMatteis had an audacious plan for the 300th issue: Captain America would throw away his shield and renounce violence for good after the death of his Nazi nemesis the Red Skull. In Sean Howe's book *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story*, DeMatteis reveals that he intended to turn Cap into a global peace activist, aggravating both his own government and fellow superheroes, before being assassinated by his wartime sidekick Bucky. The mantle of Captain America would pass to Black Crow, a Native American superhero, thus making the role represent the America that predated the pilgrim settlers. A pacifist Rogers was too much for Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter, who freaked out and rewrote the issue, causing DeMatteis to quit in disgust. *Get the commie off the book.*



Captain America continued to evolve, in sometimes unsavoury directions. In 2003, writer Mark Millar turned Cap into a belligerent post-9/11 hard man who beat a foe to a bloody pulp while hollering, "You think this letter on my head stands for France?" But just three years later, in the *Civil War* storyline that inspired the new Captain America movie, Millar backtracked and made him an instinctive rebel, leading a group of guerrilla Avengers against the establishment yes-men headed by Iron Man. To Captain America, the authoritarian Superhero Registration Act was simply un-American. *Civil War* ended with Cap shot to death (or, this being one of Marvel's most cherished characters, "death") on the steps of a courthouse.

Even if the movie adaptation follows suit, marking the end of Chris Evans' tenure, and perhaps of Steve Rogers, that doesn't mean there will be no more Captain America movies. Across the decades, more than a dozen different characters have taken the job of Captain America when Rogers resigned, died or was otherwise indisposed. In the comic books the current shield-holder is Sam Wilson, formerly known as The Falcon.

As for creator Joe Simon, he lived long enough to see Captain America "killed" in *Civil War*. "It's a hell of a time for him to go," he told the *New York Daily News*. "We really need him now." He died in 2011, aged 98, shortly after the release of *Captain America: The First Avenger*, knowing his creation was in safe hands. He might not be the stuff of Ibsen, but the "man out of time" never grows old. ■





BATTLE

ROYALE

The Marvel Cinematic Universe is on the verge of tearing itself apart in *Captain America: Civil War*. Chris Evans, Robert Downey Jr. and directors Joe and Anthony Russo warn things will never be the same again...

WORDS HELEN O'HARA



THIS IS LIKE A DRUNKEN FIGHT AT a wedding,” says director Anthony Russo. “They dredge up all those horrible things that have existed for years, and suddenly somebody throws a punch.” The difference between what Auntie Doreen said about Our Sharon and the almighty feud that erupts in the third *Captain America* movie, *Civil War*, however, is that most nuptial knockdowns don’t involve enough firepower to reduce entire cities to rubble.

With some fans dubbing it ‘Avengers 2.5’, *Civil War* features almost all the main, terrestrial Marvel characters, with newcomers like Black Panther, Ant-Man and the freshly rebooted Spider-Man more than making up for the sizeable holes left by Hulk and Thor. Not merely a sequel to one of the Marvel Cinematic Universe’s finest films, 2014’s *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, this will also prepare the ground for the two-part monster mash of *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018/19).

No pressure, then, for the returning *Winter Soldier* directors, Joe and Anthony Russo, and third-time *Captain America* screenwriters Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely. “The scale is enormous,” says Joe Russo. “From a character and storytelling standpoint, it’s by far the largest movie we’ve done.”

This won’t be a faithful adaptation of the 2006-07 comic crossover with which it shares a name — any more than *Age Of Ultron* was — but it asks the same question: who watches the watchmen? Or, more precisely, who orders these superheroes into action after the collapse of S.H.I.E.L.D. and the disastrous self-policing attempted by Tony Stark (Robert Downey Jr.) in *Ultron*? Marvel Comics’ *Civil War* revolved around a disaster caused by heroic irresponsibility as well as villainy. There, Iron Man led the subsequent drive to register superheroes with the government, while Captain America

leapt off a S.H.I.E.L.D. helicarrier to resist this assault on personal liberty. Here, Iron Man remains on the side of the authorities, but it’s the international Sokovian Accords, following the Ultron incident, that will govern the superheroes’ deployment.

“*Civil War*, to me, was one of the coolest strings of the comic books,” says Downey Jr. of his decision to join the film as neither the lead character, nor Avengers team-player but, arguably, its antagonist. “They were doing a third Cap film, and this was a way to super-charge it. At first I was like, ‘Hey, I have plenty to do — I’m not trying to see how many other people’s movies I can be involved in.’ But honestly I have a creative fondness for Chris Evans — I was one of the voices in his ear when he was making the decision to join [the Marvel Cinematic Universe] — and it afforded an opportunity to get a glimpse at some of the future star players on the Marvel team, like Chadwick (*Boseman*) as Black

Above: Team Iron Man line up for action. **Above right:** Sebastian Stan and Chris Evans on set with Joe and Anthony Russo. **Right:** These boots were made for walking, reckons Scarlett Johansson’s Natasha Romanoff.



Scratch me if you can:
Frank Grillo returns
as Crossbones.



“This film is an extreme shift. It’s a psychological thriller.” Joe Russo

Panther. So I got really excited.”

The Russo brothers’ last film, *Winter Soldier*, “changed elements of the Marvel Universe,” as Joe puts it, referring to the destruction of S.H.I.E.L.D. and the revelation of Nazi splinter-group HYDRA’s continued existence. “But the consequences of *Civil War* will have an even more significant impact,” he says. “In *Civil War*, we’re going to change the Marvel Cinematic Universe’s psychology, and it’s an extreme shift. *Winter Soldier* was a political thriller; this is a psychological thriller.”

THERE IS DEFINITELY a weight to the drama *Empire* sees unfolding when we arrive on the *Captain America: Civil War* set in Berlin, during the summer of 2015. Today’s scenes are shot beneath the city’s Olympic Stadium, a stark neo-classical structure where, in 1936, Jesse Owens outran the Nazis’ racist ideology. It might seem like an odd place to find a character who knocked out Adolf Hitler more than 200 times, but returning Cap to Germany was a deliberate choice by the Russos, to “bring the character full-circle”, as Joe puts it.

Directly beneath what was once the dictator’s box, a refurbished car park that serves as a private entrance for dignitaries has been repurposed to play a government office where Steve Rogers, Falcon (Anthony Mackie) and one of Downey Jr.’s “future star players”, Black Panther, arrive to face Emily VanCamp’s returning Agent Sharon Carter and Martin Freeman’s Everett Ross.

In the comics, Ross is the US government’s liaison to Wakanda and

a frequent ally of Panther. Here, he’s working for a ‘Joint Counter Terrorism Centre’, but it’s a solid bet that he’ll also appear in Panther’s standalone film. The scene is intense: Sebastian Stan’s Bucky is being rolled away in shackles for “psychological examination”. Captain America and Falcon also seem to be in the authorities’ bad books, and are led away to face person or persons unknown (our money’s on William Hurt’s Thaddeus Ross — no relation to Everett).

After wrapping the scene, Evans is the last one off set. He stands back to let others through the door first, a courtesy that echoes Steve Rogers himself. “It’s beautiful playing a guy who just wants to be a good man,” he says. “You can’t help but take some of that home with you.”

But somewhere along the way, the Captain and Iron Man have passed each other en route to the opposite ends of the spectrum of respect for authority. “We’re counter-culture guys,” says Joe Russo. “To take a character who’s that symbolic and turn him counter-cultural was, to us, a devious and interesting way to approach a movie called *Captain America*.”

Tony Stark, meanwhile, is haunted by guilt following that whole accidentally-created-a-monster-called-Ultron episode, and increasingly aware of the need to regulate extraordinary powers. It’s a huge shift for the character who, in his second film, refused to share his technology with the government. Now, he’s the one urging restraint and responsibility — and unlike the *Civil War* comics’ Tony, the writers have worked very hard to make him at least as sympathetic as Steve. >



CAPTAIN AMERICA:
CIVIL WAR SPECIAL



“Hopefully you’ll leave wondering if Steve and Tony are both acting in selfish interests,” says Downey Jr., and reports from early test screenings suggest audience loyalties are split. Anthony Russo describes Stark’s journey in the movie as “fascinating... Robert and Chris are incredible. The conflict between the two of them is incredibly emotional and it’s beautifully played out.”

Part of their animosity is down to a clash between the high ideals of Steve’s “greatest generation” mentality and the selfish Baby Boomer outlook of the narcissistic Tony. But more than that, there’s an element of near-sibling rivalry. “[Tony’s father] Howard Stark feels that Steve is one of the best things he ever did,” McFeely explains. “So there must be a great deal of pressure when you grow up as Tony, hearing about Steve Rogers as the person you ought to be and you’re not.”

Evans agrees. “There’s a history, no doubt, from Tony’s point of view,” he says. “I think that may be something Steve forgets at times, because to carry

baggage from a self-serving point of view is kind of a foreign concept to him. But it is this sibling friction — and with families that’s where you have the most love but it’s where you have the most struggle, too.”

ROGERS IS DRIVEN, at least in part, by his friendship with Bucky Barnes, who resurfaced in the last *Captain America* movie as Russian assassin The Winter Soldier. “There’s a conflict between Tony and Steve, but the dynamic of Bucky pours gasoline on the open flame,” says Evans. “I love putting Steve in situations where he doesn’t know what to do. When you have a guy who refuses to bleed on people and puts himself last consistently, it can be a little dry. What makes these movies good is that they always try to give him a little bit of confusion — and in this movie there’s a lot of uncertainty, and that’s how the stakes have been raised.”

It’s the Bucky element that makes this, definitively, a *Captain America* rather than an *Avengers* movie. As The Winter

Soldier, he may have murdered hundreds (including, the last film hinted, Howard Stark), but he did so while brainwashed.

“He’ll never just be Bucky Barnes again,” says Sebastian Stan, who plays the tortured veteran. “This movie, for him, is very much the good wolf and the bad wolf coming together — or maybe *not* coming together. So when is he triggered? When is he remembering things? He’s trying to find out about himself, his past, and what sort of world he’s in.”

Joe Russo describes him as an “incredibly complicated character. He and Steve have the emotional connection of brothers — even more so because Bucky was all Steve had growing up. Bucky was his protector, and that dynamic shifted [when Steve became Captain America], and now it has shifted again. The Cap-Bucky story is a love story; he can’t let go of his brother. *He* can reconcile Bucky’s crimes, but other people have no emotional context for Bucky, and they need to point the finger. We have no idea if he’s a hero or a villain. People are going to walk out arguing about that, too.”

Clockwise from above: Cap goes underground; Sharon Carter (Emily VanCamp) and Everett Ross (Martin Freeman); Bucky Barnes (Sebastian Stan); Scarlet Witch (Elizabeth Olsen).



AS DOWNEY JR. PUTS it, the conflict between characters means “the call sheet is split down the middle.” The first big challenge for the Russos was handling what Anthony describes as “basically the cast of a Soderbergh movie” playing wildly popular characters.

“There’s a very tough, complicated sequence that involves a great number of characters,” says Joe. This was “the Splashdown”, the almighty airport clash we glimpsed in the trailer. “There was a lot of character interaction, a lot of character moments, and you need to dig them all out.” He and Anthony insist that figuring out everyone’s motivations was more important to this on-screen conflict than the nitty-gritty of the action. As Anthony says, “Spectacle can only carry you so far. If you don’t have character then it’s empty spectacle and the movie starts to run out of gas pretty quickly. You can only watch so many explosions and unmotivated car crashes.”

The second challenge, shared by writers Markus and McFeely, was that they needed to be careful, and inventive, about how they drew the battle lines between Team Iron Man and Team Cap.

Unsurprisingly, Anthony Mackie’s Falcon quickly sides with his fellow



Extreme Measures

THE SOKOVIAN ACCORD, WHICH KICKS OFF CIVIL WAR, IS JUST THE LATEST HARSH ACT IN A LONG LINE OF MOVIE LEGISLATION



THX 1138 (1971)

THE LAW Sex is a crime, and mind-altering drugs are mandatory.

THE PUNISHMENT Offenders are chased by police robots with scary chrome faces, and “mindlocked”.



Logan's Run (1976)

THE LAW At the age of 30, you die.

THE PUNISHMENT Death, via the ritual of “Carrouseul”. Essentially you’re vaporised in a cross between the Coliseum and a giant salad-spinner.



Footloose (1984)

THE LAW No dancing! No rock music! No footloosing!

THE PUNISHMENT Confiscation of your Sunday shoes.



Demolition Man (1993)

THE LAW The Verbal Morality Statute, banning the public from using unwholesome language.

THE PUNISHMENT Fines, dispensed via tickets that double as toilet paper, which is useful.



Equilibrium (2002)

THE LAW Emotions are banned. Hence reading poetry, gawping at art or listening to music makes you a ‘Sense Offender’.

THE PUNISHMENT A Grammaton Cleric will gun kata you to death.



The Purge (2013)

THE LAW Using the ‘28th amendment’, the US government have legalised all crime for 24 hours a year.

THE PUNISHMENT You can’t break this law, but can be killed by it. *NICK DE SEMYEN*

The One-Shots

WILLIAM HURT'S THADDEUS ROSS IS BACK. WHAT HOPE FOR MARVEL'S OTHER BIG-NAME ONE-TIMERS?



TOMMY LEE JONES

Putting his intimidating bark and deadpan stare to good use as super-soldier-program boss Colonel Chester Phillips in *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), Jones was left on the runway in the 1940s. His best chance of an encore is a flashback cameo. Well, either that or time travel.



CHRISTOPHER ECCLESTON

In *Thor: The Dark World* (2013), Eccleston subsumed himself in prosthetics as dark elf overlord Malekith. He's probably not in a rush to return to the make-up chair, and was definitively squished by his own spaceship at the climax. Yet villains have survived worse. Malekith could return... AS FLATMAN!



HUGO WEAVING

Another *First Avenger* alumnus, and another actor who performed villainy under prosthetics, as HYDRA-führer Red Skull. But he was disintegrated by the Tesseract, right? Or was he just teleported somewhere? One current fan theory suggests he's already returned, in a new form, in TV's *Agents Of S.H.I.E.L.D.*.



SAM ROCKWELL

Tony Stark's weaselly business rival Justin Hammer was imprisoned at the end of *Iron Man 2* (2010), giving him plenty of time to brew resentment, hatch an escape plan and find other Stark-haters he can pimp with advanced tech, just as he's done over and over in the *Iron Man* comic books.



JENNA COLEMAN

Think Karen Gillan is the only Doctor Who assistant to appear in the MCU? What about Jenna Coleman, who popped up in *The First Avenger* as Connie, one of Bucky's dates. Who's to say Thanos hasn't turned her into a space-assassin 'daughter', like Gillan's Nebula in *Guardians Of The Galaxy*? WHO'S TO SAY? **DAN JOLIN**



soldier. "Sam and Steve have become close confidants and good friends," says Mackie. "Steve is the leader but he definitely comes to Sam and bounces ideas off him." But Falcon and Bucky, nicknamed "Cap's two girlfriends" on set, are not his only allies. VanCamp's Sharon Carter — who is *actually* Cap's girlfriend in the comics, and perhaps in the future here — is, she says, "willing to go the distance to protect him".

If we can trust the posters and the airport conflagration we glimpsed in the trailer, Paul Rudd's Ant-Man and Jeremy Renner's Hawkeye also side with the rebels, as does Elizabeth Olsen's Scarlet Witch, returning from *Age Of Ultron*. "She's a complex person, and extremely powerful," says Joe Russo. "She doesn't really understand the depth of her power. I don't think anyone does. That can make her a frightening character, especially to the government. In this movie, we find her at the beginning under Cap's tutelage. He's showing her the ropes as an Avenger."

Siding with Stark, we find War Machine (Don Cheadle) and *Ultron*'s 'newborn' android, the Vision (Paul Bettany). He marries Scarlet Witch in the comics, but the pair are at odds here — victims of the Russos' delight in rending apart traditional pairings. Though, as, Anthony emphasises, "We worked hard to figure out very specific reasons why these characters would get pushed to one side or the other."

Black Panther also appears inclined to control the superhero threat (see page 74), and, despite her close allegiance to Steve in *The Winter Soldier*, so is Black Widow. "Our new challenge is that this universe is bigger than the Avengers," explains Scarlett Johansson. "There's a school of thought that it needs oversight and management, some kind of ground rules. That seems logical — though Cap and I have had a bad experience with 'The Man', so to speak." The sticking point for Natasha is Bucky. "Barnes is a total wildcard. He can't really be trusted because he's been psychologically



From top: Johansson punching low on set; Sam Wilson (Anthony Mackie), Steve Rogers (Chris Evans) and T'Challa (Chadwick Boseman); Iron Man (Downey Jr.), bruised but unbeaten.

compromised. He still poses a threat. I think that's how Natasha would see it."

The final key combatant here is Tom Holland's Spider-Man, returning to the Marvel Studios fold after a deal was struck with rights holders Sony. He comes in after the battle lines have been drawn, and forms a relationship with one character who, for now, the Russos won't identify. "Tom's unbelievable," says Joe. "We're very excited to present our vision of Spider-Man to the world. He was my favourite character growing up, so for a comic geek like me this is a real moment."

IF IT SEEMS LIKE THE RUSSOS, and Marvel, are taking a huge risk putting all these beloved characters at one another's throats, it is a calculated one.

"The only thing I ever have trepidation about is it getting stale," says Downey Jr., who's now been in the Marvel game for over eight years. "When I hear words like 'radical' and 'risky',



that's what gets me up in the morning. Past a certain point you just gotta say, 'These are the basic tenets of what we're doing,' and then it's a huge experiment." Evans, portraying Rogers for the fifth time, agrees that the storytelling drives him forward. "It's Marvel, they give good scripts," he says. "I'd do this for free. Wait, don't print that!"

When *Empire* caught up with the Russos recently, they'd already had riotously successful test screenings and were beginning five days of pick-ups to finish off *Civil War*, with Evans, Downey Jr. and Gwyneth Paltrow's Pepper among those returning. Then, at some point in the next month, they'll start focusing on *Infinity War* in earnest. Markus and McFeely have already produced a first draft of that script after spending months breaking the story.

"It's an exciting time in the Marvel building," says McFeely. "Peyton Reed is in one corner (*working on Ant-Man And The Wasp*); *Thor 3* is over in that corner. We're taking up the middle of the floor, *Panther* will be in another corner. *Spider-Man*, they're around. *Guardians 2* has already moved to Atlanta. It's ridiculous!"

Markus says he's especially looking forward to the broader scope of an *Avengers* film. "We've written three movies about a pretty stoic guy," he says, "and now we get to write for all the gang. But *Civil War* was a walk in the park compared to these other two. We're writing scenes for characters that haven't been cast yet..."

Joe Russo assures us there are substantial threads connecting the wars *Civil* and *Infinity*. "We wanted *Winter Soldier*, *Civil War* and the *Infinity War* films to have a strong through-line," he says. "We look at this movie as setting the stage for *Infinity War*, how it starts and what condition everybody's in."

That hints at significant fall-out from this battle, and Anthony Russo promises a "very dramatic ending that will be very controversial for a lot of people" — which hints at at least one character's death, potentially, and certainly a sudden interest in solo projects for the artists formerly known as The Avengers. What could ever get them back together? Our money is on either a really lucrative reunion tour, or a megalomaniac from outer space with purple skin. Let's see which turns up first... ■

CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR IS OUT ON APRIL 29 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN A FUTURE ISSUE.

ROAR POWER

GET ON UP STAR CHADWICK BOSEMAN JOINS THE FRAY AS BLACK PANTHER — A VERY DIFFERENT KIND OF HERO FOR THE MARVEL CINEMATIC UNIVERSE WORDS HELEN O'HARA

Chadwick Boseman is best known for losing himself in astonishingly convincing portrayals of real-life historical figures. He broke through as Jackie Robinson in 2013 baseball drama *42* and went on to embody *Godfather Of Soul* James Brown in *Get On Up* a year later. Both roles were, it turns out, good preparation for *Civil War*, which sees Boseman take on another groundbreaking historical figure: the first black superhero lead in comic books, Black Panther.

Created by writer Stan Lee and artist Jack Kirby, Black Panther first appeared in the pages of *Fantastic Four* in July 1966 (predating Huey P. Newton's black nationalist movement of the same name by three months), before joining *The Avengers* in 1968. Decked in sleek, high-tech combat armour and possessing catlike agility and senses, he faced off against the shady likes of Erik Killmonger, Man-Ape and the *Age Of Ultron*-cameoing Ulysses Klaw (Andy Serkis).

So, in contrast to James Brown and Jackie Robinson, this character does spend rather more of his time leaping around and between buildings. As is clear when *Empire* meets Boseman in his *Civil War* trailer, where we find him still recovering from the previous day's rooftop action scene, which he had to shoot in 100-degree heat while wearing his full Black Panther suit.

Despite such sweltering action sequences, Boseman insists that Black Panther is "not a superhero" in the usual sense. Amid the grand-scale tussle that is the *Civil War*, he stands apart. "I'm not on anybody's team," says Boseman. "It's my political mission to tame it and get it under control."

Director Joe Russo admits that introducing "a character we love and who people have high expectations for"

proved a challenge, especially "in a movie that has so much going on. But it actually works out really well. We found a very interesting place in the narrative for him, where he's his own third-party radical."

So this latest introduction to the Marvel Cinematic Universe, real-name T'Challa, is to Boseman, at least, more grounded than your average costumed crime-fighter — he's a political figure. And royalty, to boot. "T'Challa is a prince of Wakanda," he explains. "All heroes have a weight on their shoulders, but there will eventually be a difference in what I have to carry politically and socially."

Joe and Anthony Russo believe this is an appropriate Marvel instalment in which to introduce Black Panther, as they see some similarity to the big guy in red, white and blue. "Because he's an emblem and a representative of his country in the way that Captain America is," says Anthony Russo. "But in a different way too: Cap is an everyman who became elevated because of his virtues and Panther is a prince. So it's an interesting contrast."

In an emphatic counter to too many African stereotypes, Wakanda is one of the world's most advanced nations, home to most of the world's stock of the 'vibranium' which makes up Cap's shield. "The idea of Wakanda is sort of, what if Timbuktu hadn't been conquered?" says

Boseman, who also invented his own accent for the character, figuring out where on the continent the fictional country would lie. "I basically listened to people and picked what sounded cool, since it's not a specific place. It's in the southern, central part of Africa. The attitude, the musicality, is my preference for the character. It has to fit his dignity."

Of course, this *is* Marvel, and there are many 'super' elements to this hero. In the comics, Black Panther combines mystical powers with high-tech accessories. The latter are definitely presented in *Civil War*: vibranium is woven into his suit to provide extra protection, and has been shaped into 'claws' so sharp they can cut through other metals. There are also, Boseman teases, further "properties to the suit that you'll see at a later date". He won't confirm whether his character has already undergone the initiation ceremony that imbues him with superhuman senses, strength and speed, but it's a fair bet he'll have swallowed his magic brew by the end of the *Black Panther* solo movie, to be directed by *Creed*'s Ryan Coogler ("He's dynamic, he loves the character, he's such a great choice to direct that movie," says Joe Russo).

Each Marvel solo adventure so far has had its own distinct tone, and the same will be true of *Black Panther*. "There is one genre I think Black Panther lends himself to, but I'm not going to say," Boseman tells us. "*Black Panther* is a superhero movie but it's still character-driven. That's my assessment so far. You identify with what you know, you have the fantasy of this other world but that can only hold you so far. It's what's real that is going to hold you in the end." ■



Chadwick Boseman as Black Panther.

BLACK PANTHER IS OUT ON FEBRUARY 9, 2018.





the rise

fall



and incredible return of Pee-wee Herman

After 25 years,
everyone's favourite
madcap manchild
is finally back in
an all-new movie
adventure

WORDS ALEX GODFREY

Pee-wee Herman is chomping on a popsicle.



The sun is silly-hot today in South Pasadena, where new film *Pee-wee's Big Holiday* is being shot, and he's requested something soothing, to cool him down as we talk in his trailer. So here he sits, Pee-wee Herman, once one of the most popular family-entertainment characters in the world, wearing his trademark, tight-fitting grey Glen plaid suit and red bow tie, eyeballing *Empire* and savouring his ice-pop. Which is exactly what you'd expect to find Pee-wee Herman eating.

It is also exactly what you'd expect, somehow, of Paul Reubens, the man who has lived and breathed Pee-wee, on and off, for nearly four decades. Here in the trailer, Reubens stays in the suit but ditches the shouty voice — his own is softer, gentler, considerably less animated. Things were different during the 1980s, when he would only do press in character. For a long time, Reubens wanted the world to believe Pee-wee was real, keeping himself hidden from view. Even today, Pee-wee is such a beautifully realised character that knowing there's an actor in there somewhere means nothing when you see him walking about before the cameras, yelping gleefully on the sidewalks of Pasadena. It doesn't feel like a film production; it feels like we're on Pee-wee Herman's street.

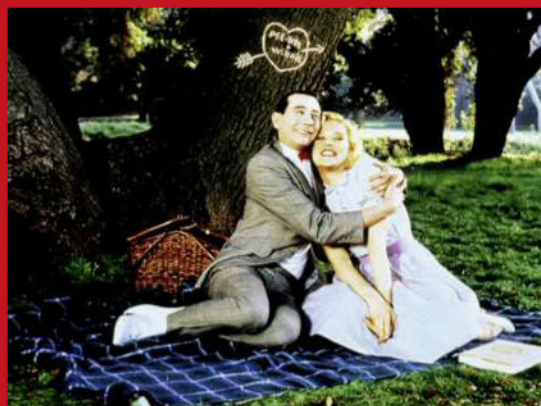
It's a little odd to be looking at Pee-wee but talking to Reubens, now 63. *Empire* wonders how it feels to still be sporting that undersized suit 39 years later, strolling around this quaint Los Angeles suburb. "Well, I became an actor because I thought I'd pick a job where I never had to wear a suit, so there's that..." he deadpans. "It feels the same in that way that it did 30 years ago, where I was like, 'Ah, I'm wearing this suit all day!' Between you and me and your billion readers, it's not that comfortable. If I had a choice I'd be Pee-wee Herman with Bermuda shorts and a T-shirt, but it doesn't work as good."

Three decades plus is a long time to have been wearing such a tight outfit, but

for Reubens it was certainly worth it. During his '80s heyday, Pee-wee was huge, launching Tim Burton's film career with the joyous *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*, then becoming one of Saturday-morning kids' television's biggest stars with *Pee-wee's Playhouse*, a surreal Technicolor world of talking furniture, cowboys played by Laurence Fishburne and never-ending fun. As snarky as he was sweet, Pee-wee was America's favourite manchild, both adorably sweet and hilariously petulant. Then, suddenly, he disappeared for a couple of decades. But now, here we are, finally joining him on a new adventure in which Pee-wee, seemingly unbothered by the ravages of time, heads off on his first vacation. It's been a long and crooked road.

PAUL REUBENS WAS BORN in 1952, and spent much of his childhood in a New York farming community called Oneonta. It was an idyllic town, with animals roaming freely and crab apple trees lining the street. Pee-wee Herman was born in 1977, on a little stage in a Los Angeles comedy club. The character, Reubens thought at the time, was a spontaneous creation. Looking back, he can trace the DNA.

South Pasadena, which doubles for Pee-wee's street in *Pee-wee's Big Holiday*, as it did in 1985 for *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*, is almost unbearably apple-pie, a monument to postcard Americana. When the cameras roll, neighbours wave as they walk past. "Morning, Pee-wee!" says one. "Morning, Mr. Megatron!" Pee-wee hollers back, driving up the road in a miniature Ford Thunderbird. It's all rooted in Reubens' early years. "When I was growing up, America was very much like that, or at least, that's what they were pushing on television and in books," he says. "Everything I saw as a kid was very idyllic. My parents took me and my brother and sister to every single little storybook-land tourist attraction. All of





that is definitely represented in what I do.”

After studying performance art at LA’s CalArts, Reubens joined improv group The Groundlings, creating Pee-wee as part of a skit about a comedy club. Reubens dreamed up a hopeless comedian who, like him, couldn’t recall punchlines. The name came from a harmonica he had that said “Pee Wee” on it, and an overly enthusiastic kid he’d known growing up whose surname was Herman. The voice came from a teenager Reubens had played in a repertory production. The suit belonged to Groundlings director Gary Austin (who was shorter than Reubens, hence the tight fit). The bow tie was given to him by someone as he went on stage.

The crowd loved it, so he kept pushing Pee-wee, deciding the character would find greater success if Reubens never appeared publicly as himself. He wanted people to think Pee-wee was real, even, in 1979, auditioning for TV’s *The Dating Game* as the character, to oblivious production staff. “That was really exciting,” he says, “because it seemed very conceptual to me, almost performance art. Except that no-one knew it was that but me.” He got through, appearing on the show three times, always in character, and won (the actual date, alas, fell through). His fate

was sealed. “I went, ‘Whoa, this is what I’m gonna do. Focus right on this.’”

And so it was Pee-wee who became famous: Reubens didn’t just take a back seat, he locked himself in the boot. It’s Pee-wee Herman, not Reubens, who has a star on the Hollywood Walk Of Fame. Years ago, Reubens was offered a spot on American reality TV show *The Surreal Life*. He said he would, but only if he could do it as Pee-wee. They said no, so he didn’t.

While off-duty, Reubens does not walk, talk or act like Pee-wee, yet he concedes that the line blurs. “I have a lot of affection for the character,” he says. “If you strip away all of my horribleness you get Pee-wee Herman. Or a part of Pee-wee. Although one thing we’ve been trying to be careful about [on the new film] is Pee-wee’s snarky side. Pee-wee Herman has never been a total innocent. I think lots of people like that he can flip really fast and not be so sweet. If you’re exuberant or joyful or snarky or frustrated, everybody has a version of that. I just think that Pee-wee doesn’t have that much context because I don’t think about it that much and neither does he. He just is.”

Judd Apatow, producer of *Pee-wee’s Big Holiday*, thinks the character’s appeal is timeless. He’s been a fan from the start,

Above: Our hero (Paul Reubens) hangs out in *Pee-wee’s Big Holiday*. **Left:** Making his film debut in Tim Burton’s *Pee-wee’s Big Adventure* (1985). **Bottom left:** Falling for Penelope Ann Miller’s Winnie in follow-up *Big Top Pee-wee* (1988).

having caught Pee-wee’s *Dating Game* appearances in 1979. “He was always so hysterical,” he says. “And there are very few original characters like that in comedy. People don’t do that anymore. It’s a throwback to the Marx Brothers. It makes me laugh harder than almost anything. I loved the Marx Brothers and W. C. Fields, Abbott and Costello, Jerry Lewis, and this is as close as we have to that.”

Reubens is loathe to analyse Pee-wee’s psychological make-up. “Some people were confused about it: ‘Is he slow? Is he a man, is he a kid? What is it?’ And I never really wanted to explain it much. I never liked to think about it that much because it takes the fun out of it for me. But I also just didn’t think it was wise to go, ‘He’s 26.’ Or whatever. If some people thought I was slow, then great. If it works like that.”

THE CHARACTER’S perceived reality was one of its great strengths, but it also worked horribly against both Pee-wee and Reubens. It is why the media had such a field day when, in 1991, Reubens suffered a high-profile arrest. After exhausting himself in the late ’80s — two movies, five TV seasons, with the final two filmed back to back — Reubens had ended *Pee-wee’s Playhouse* to take a break from showbusiness. And then, while lying low with his parents in Sarasota, Florida, he was arrested for masturbating in a porn cinema. The incident swiftly and violently dismantled so much of what Reubens had done with Pee-wee. CBS cancelled its re-runs of *Pee-wee’s Playhouse*, leading many to believe that this incident actually killed the show Reubens had already ended.

It was easy tabloid fodder. Later, Reubens commented that the story dominated the news even over the grisly revelations about serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer, who’d been arrested three days earlier. The mortified actor retreated and went into shock, barely leaving the house for months. He has always maintained he wasn’t doing what they said he was doing in that cinema, but didn’t want to go through a publicised trial, so pleaded no contest, was given 75 hours of community service and, bizarrely, was asked to do a public service announcement, in character as Pee-wee, about the dangers of crack.

Surprisingly, a few weeks later Reubens was invited, as Pee-wee, to introduce the MTV Video Music Awards. On stage he seemed overwhelmed by the crowd’s roars, basking in the glow as they chanted Pee-wee’s name. “Heard any good jokes lately?” he said after collecting himself, in reference not only to the

water-cooler wisecracks and tabloid attacks, but to his own contemporaries taking shots at him during stand-up gigs. “So funny I forgot to laugh.”

Pee-wee’s comeback, though, was fleeting. MTV, which had enjoyed a long relationship with him (he’d often appear in its New Year’s Eve shows), offered to broadcast re-runs of *Pee-wee’s Playhouse*, but Reubens thought it best to just draw a line under the show. Concerned that Pee-wee’s image had been tarnished by the arrest, he instead began taking other film and TV roles (see sidebar, right). He also spent three years developing *Meet The Muckles*, a comedy pilot for NBC about a family of variety performers, but when he was finally done the network had lost interest, and passed.

Meanwhile, none of the acting work he’d been doing had been inspiring him. In 1999, appearing on Jay Leno’s show to promote his role in *Mystery Men* — the first time he’d ever been on a talk-show as himself — Reubens announced that he was writing a new Pee-wee film. The character, dormant for almost a decade, was always a part of Reubens’ id, and wasn’t going to sleep forever. “In the same way I went, ‘I’m gonna stop doing this,’ I just one day went, ‘I wanna do it again,’” he says now.

In fact, he was writing various Pee-wee films, two of which he began to mention regularly. There was *The Pee-wee Herman Story*, a more adult, *Valley Of The Dolls*-inspired tale following Pee-wee as he finds fame as a singer, goes to Hollywood to make musical movies, then turns into a pill-popping, booze-guzzling monster. And there was *Pee-Wee’s Playhouse: The Movie*, bringing the *Playhouse* world to life outside of the house, in Puppetland. However, Reubens no longer had the clout to make a Pee-wee movie — the character, he was told, was no longer bankable. In a bid to convince studios otherwise, he decided to resurrect the Pee-wee stage show he’d mounted in 1981.

Essentially a live, rather bawdy version of *Pee-wee’s Playhouse*, loosely centring around Pee-wee’s wish to fly, the 2010 show was a blast, and a hit: in Los Angeles, where demand was so great it had to be moved to a larger theatre, it boasted a four-week sell-out run, and then performed to equally ecstatic crowds for a limited two-month run on Broadway. Pee-wee was back, and Reubens’ plan to get a movie out of it came up roses.

“My wife Leslie (*Mann*) and I went,” says Judd Apatow, “and it’s the hardest I’ve ever seen my wife laugh. She just lost her mind. I thought, ‘This is the most fun thing ever, we have to find a way to make another movie.’” Reubens told Apatow



Holiday high-jinks with Alia Shawkat, Stephanie Beatriz and Jessica Pohly.



beyond the playhouse

THE BEST OF REUBENS' PEE-WEE-FREE APPEARANCES

1 *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (1992)

AS: Amilyn

After being abducted by vampiric henchman Amilyn, Buffy later drives a stake through his heart, with Reubens going to town on an incredibly protracted death scene. His first role after his 1991 arrest, rather than shy away from what had happened, he insisted on looking as much like his mugshot as possible.

2 *Batman Returns* (1992) / *Gotham* (2016)

AS: Tucker Cobblepot

Seven years after working together on *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*, Tim Burton cast Reubens as The Penguin's dad, who tosses his deformed baby into Gotham's river at the beginning of the film. He was recently cast in the role again, for fleshed-out prequel duties on TV's *Gotham*. "It's been really fun and really thrilling," says Reubens. "It's extremely bloody and violent."

3 *Mystery Men* (1999)

AS: The Spleen

Director Kinka Usher was desperate to cast Reubens in the superhero comedy: "I was the kicking and screaming baby saying, 'I have to have him, I have

to have him,'" he later said.

Reubens repaid him by coming up, well, trumps, as the man who can make people faint with his abominable flatulence.

4 *Blow* (2001)

AS: Derek Foreal

Loosely based on a real person, Derek Foreal is the hairdresser/drug dealer who kickstarts George Jung's (Johnny Depp) illicit career with an obscene amount of marijuana.

Director Ted Demme cast Reubens after watching *Pee-wee's Playhouse* with his daughter, challenging him to come up with a character even "a quarter as memorable as Pee-wee." Relishing a more heavy-weight role, Reubens duly camped it up.

5 *Life During Wartime* (2009)

AS: Andy

In Todd Solondz's re-cast sequel to *Happiness*, Reubens is Andy, the schlub formerly played by Jon Lovitz, who, having taken his own life, now revisits his ex-love Joy in ghostly visions. It's a sombre performance, and Solondz cast Reubens not only to showcase his emotional versatility, but knowing that Reubens' troubled history would give the role extra pathos.

about his new Pee-wee screenplays, but Apatow suggested it would be more logical to do something more along the lines of *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*, a road-trip movie set in the real world. He introduced Reubens to writer Paul Rust, and they began on a script, with Apatow helping to shape it. "What Judd likes to bring to anything he does," says Reubens, "is a certain character arc and growth... Well, what he usually does applies 80 per cent to this movie. We can't do all of what he asked us to do. Pee-wee Herman doesn't make a huge, big change. Like ever."

Ultimately, Apatow just wanted to help Reubens get his movie made. "This is a man who knows exactly what he wants to do," says Apatow. "A lot of my job was to help find a director he would be in sync with. And a company that wanted to 100 per cent support his vision." That company would be Netflix, which stepped up to the plate with healthy funds, and that director is John Lee, who had been responsible for *Wonder Showzen*, MTV2's very dark, very funny take on *Sesame Street*. Reubens gushes about working with Lee, comparing the experience to the one he had with Burton 30 years earlier. "I'm incredibly lucky to have found and worked with Tim, and John Lee has been a rock star. Although now it is more complicated. Me and Tim were practically kids..."

PLAYING THE ETERNAL manchild at the age of 63 is something Reubens has wrestled with. Will it convince, or distract? Is it weird? Does it even matter? "At the very beginning," he says of the new film's production, "to conceptualise how I would come back as Pee-wee Herman, it was: 'I'm still gonna play Pee-wee, what does that mean?' We discussed that quite a bit. Do we explain where I've been? But I feel, in the big giant scheme of things, it works to me to just have, 'Here's the third Pee-wee movie.'"

Still, physically, it's a stretch, he says. "Six years ago I was doing my Pee-wee show on Broadway, doing dialogue I'd written 30 years ago, and part of me would be like, 'What are you doing?! You're too old to be doing this.' I have that feeling on and off here. There's been a few times I'm trying to pour myself into that little teeny car and I'm like, 'Are you out of your mind?' Your legs don't bend like that anymore.' Trying to make a Pee-wee Herman movie at this point in my life is certainly like a little bit of a measuring stick: 'Oh, I can do this,' and 'I can't do that.'"

Some digital work, it was decided, should be done to, let's say, smooth out

some edges, but they were unsure of how far to go. Should Pee-wee look like he did in 1985? Or maybe a decade older? Ultimately they decided to make only subtle alterations; too much trickery, says John Lee, would have been distracting. "We could have made him look younger, but it starts to look more false. Pee-wee needs to have expression. It's so easy to think of him as an animated character, and the more you push that, the more it takes away the compassion of the character. I'd rather have reality and emotion than make him Peter Pan."

Maybe, though, Pee-wee can stay young forever. Heartened by what technology can do, Reubens says he's even considering, years down the line, playing Pee-wee via performance capture. Then, he says, it doesn't matter how old he is. This, surely, is the ultimate destination for a character who has taken a life of his own: unburdened even by the shackles of his creator's body. In any case, Reubens is enjoying this second act. Last year, *Pee-wee's Playhouse* found new, young fans on Netflix. Is it nice for him to have Pee-wee back on the air? "Well, yeah, absolutely. Better than lots of other places I've been," he says, fixing *Empire* a look that speaks volumes about his past experiences.

Pee-wee's Big Holiday features a Pee-wee as funny, as timeless, as sweet and as snarky as he ever was. Time has not withered him. As ever, this is a character who loves life — played by someone who so clearly loves being him.

Apatow thinks the joy of this film is as much about Reubens as it is Pee-wee. "I feel there's some built-in emotion to just the idea of Paul making another movie," he says. "We've all waited a long time. It's loaded, in a lot of ways: we all want Pee-wee Herman to be happy. And I always felt like that would come through in the movie. We all want him to have a friend, we all want him to be accepted. And that's how you feel as a child as well. It's hard to put your finger on why you love this guy so much. But it makes you so happy. I can watch Pee-wee Herman playing with a balloon for five hours."

Despite the tight outfit and demands on his joints, it makes Reubens happy, too. "I've been bumping around for a while and now I'm just gonna have a nice little capper to my career," he says. "It's kind of fabulous to be Pee-wee Herman." Which may be the most telling thing he's said all afternoon: he's not playing Pee-wee Herman, he is Pee-wee Herman. It suits him well. ■

PEE-WEE'S BIG HOLIDAY IS ON NETFLIX FROM MARCH 18.

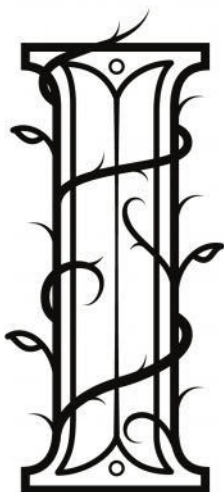


Welcome Back to the Jungle

IT'S ONE OF THE BEST-LOVED ANIMATED FEATURES, AND NOW THEY'RE MAKING IT FOR PHOTO-REAL — WITH ADDED TOOTH AND CLAW. **JON FAVREAU** REVEALS HOW HE'S TACKLING DISNEY'S MOST AMBITIOUS LIVE-ACTION ADAPTATION YET

WORDS IAN FREER
TYPE LUKE LUCAS





if you've followed my career, you'll know that I'm a bit of a Luddite," admits Jon Favreau. "But now I only think in zeros and ones. I'm using a lot of RAM. I think that's good for the brain. It helps with ageing..."

The various technology-based challenges facing Favreau on *The Jungle Book* are enough to turn him into Benjamin Button. It is early December 2015, and that strange whooshing sound in Favreau's ears is

the film's April release date hurtling toward him.

Favreau is in the UK checking in with Soho effects-house MPC, which is carrying the lion's share of the workload. He has spent the morning talking *Empire* through some impressive footage — including astonishingly life-like digital birds, a terrifying stampede and a bear floating down stream with a kid on his stomach — and has now settled into a comfy hotel suite to chat more. An engaging mixture of American can-do optimism coupled with a sincere desire not to spin you film-industry bullshit, his talk is strewn with technical jargon such as "dynamic range" and "laser projection" until he catches himself.

"I'm sorry," he smiles. "Just because I'm living in this world, doesn't mean you have to."

The Jungle Book isn't Favreau's first encounter with Disney history. In 2012, he announced *Magic Kingdom*, a film about Disney characters and attractions (or 'IP', aka intellectual property, if you're so inclined) coming to life *à la* *Night At The Museum*. That project is currently on the back burner, but it is an indication of Favreau's deep-seated passion, knowledge and respect for the studio in general, not to mention the *The Jungle Book* in particular.

"I've learned from therapy that the images of these characters and archetypes were a very early frame of reference for me," he laughs. "I didn't realise how important this was. Mowgli was in the first dream I ever remember having. So maybe it's kismet that I ended up working on this thing."

FAVREAU'S LOVE FOR DISNEY IS

infectious. He talks with reverence about the studio's classic first run of features that started in 1937 with *Snow White And The Seven Dwarfs* and ran to *Pinocchio*, *Fantasia*, *Dumbo* and *Bambi*, and he waxes lyrical about the Multiplane, Disney's then-revolutionary animation camera. But he's acutely aware he can't repeat *The Jungle Book* beat for beat. Working on two *Iron Man* movies, Favreau learned that, "It's not what was in the source material that is most important, but what you connected with in that material." So he drew up a list of moments and images from his childhood memory bank: 1) Baloo singing *The Bare Necessities*; 2) Baloo and Mowgli floating down river; 3) Bagheera finding the baby; 4) King Louie; 5) The snake with the hypnotic eyes.

If you don't recognise anything on that list (what *did* you watch in your childhood?), here's a quick primer. Adapted from Rudyard Kipling's 1894 stories, *The Jungle Book* sees man-cub Mowgli (Neel Sethi in Favreau's version) go on an Indian roadtrip with panther Bagheera (Ben Kingsley) and Baloo the bear (Bill Murray). He meets snake Kaa (Scarlett Johansson) and monkey King Louie (Christopher Walken), all the while tracked by tiger Shere Khan (Idris Elba).

The film is the next stage in Disney's retooling of its animation back catalogue into live action, following *Alice In Wonderland*, *Sleeping Beauty* do-over *Maleficent* and

Cinderella. Next up is *Beauty And The Beast*. It's a project that has raised profits (*Alice* alone made \$1 billion worldwide) but also hackles and eyebrows, from how-dare-you-tamper-with-the-classics rants to charges of creative bankruptcy.

"If you look at film history, each time there's a new technology, filmmakers re-explore material that people have connected with in the past," says Favreau. "What's nice is that when these technologies first emerged, they were used mostly for big, explosive action movies. So it's extremely refreshing to see emotional movies being told using these same tools."

Revamping fairy tales, with their princesses and evil queens, is one thing — rebooting *The Jungle Book* presents a whole world of strife. It requires photo-real animals that Mowgli (played by first-time actor Neel Sethi) can interact with. Even if the state-of-the-art tech can deliver lifelike animal performances, Favreau has to create a tone that enables the audience to believe in them.

More importantly, *The Jungle Book* is incredibly beloved — it's the Disney film liked by people who don't like Disney. There is no pining for the day when a prince will come, no twee woodland animals helping with the chores. Instead there are memorable tunes, a swinging jazzy vibe, tangible dangers and, in Mowgli and Baloo, a bromance that Todd Phillips can only dream of. What's more, Favreau has to contend with all of this in the shadow of a rival Warner Bros. version directed by Andy Serkis.

IN DECLARING HIMSELF A "LUDDITE",

Favreau wasn't exaggerating. In *Elf* — and this was in 2003, mind — he used stop-motion animation, something declared extinct in 1993 by *Jurassic Park*. On 2005's *Zathura* he employed the same motion-control technology that was used in *Star Wars* 30 years earlier. Favreau needed binoculars to see the cutting edge that Steven Spielberg and James Cameron have been living on.

Now he is facing down the unenviable task of creating realistic walking, talking and singing animals. Rather than shoot live action then cut and paste animation on top of it, he decided on the more complicated step of building an entire jungle — animals, foliage, trigger-happy dentists (maybe not) — in the computer. Favreau filmed Sethi as Mowgli on a small Los Angeles soundstage, with a strip of real jungle 15 feet wide and 100 feet long, to help acclimatise his actor, and then undertook the kind of world-building usually reserved for science-fiction.

"People have done 3D movies and people have been successful in certain ways. I thought *Gravity* was very successful in offering an immersive experience, but nobody has really built out a whole world. We thought if we could build everything from scratch, we can take some subtle liberties with scale and design, make it a little hyper-real while never losing sight of the photo-reality of the images."

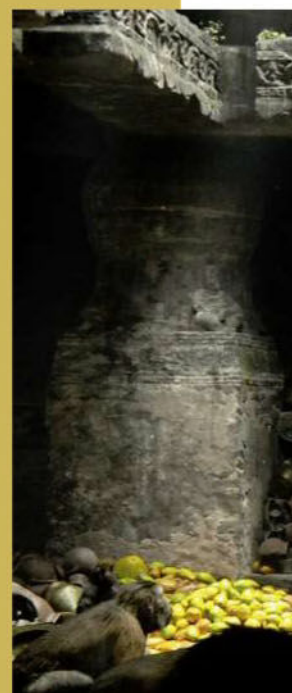
MPC's visual effects supervisor Adam Valdez describes showing Favreau his initial tests of birds as "a real hold-your-breath time. I think everybody felt it was a little bit larger than life, but it's closer than you've ever been to a real bird. It feels like you're watching the real thing."

Once Favreau was happy with the jungle, he turned his attention to the characters. He considered motion capture but decided that mapping human expressions and emotions onto animals was just "plain weird". He considered the *Babe* approach that used real animals combined with animated mouths, but that created issues within his team.

"I lost an Oscar to that talking pig," laughs visual effects supervisor Robert Legato — *Babe* pipped his *Apollo 13* to the Best Visual Effects Academy Award. Instead, he prioritised the



Clockwise from above: Mowgli (Neel Sethi) with his new wolf family; Favreau on set last year; Little Mowgli with Gigantopithecus King Louie and his monkey crew.





painstaking approach of key-frame animation to “present these human emotions in an animal’s language.” With 850 artists employed, Favreau says it is “the most handcrafted movie I’ve ever made.”

Favreau did shoot reference footage with young Sethi and Bill Murray as Baloo (“I just gave him enough room to get loose and perform,” was Favreau’s Murray-directing method), but his actors mostly avoided skintight Lycra and ping-pong balls for the more relaxed setting of the recording booth.

“I’ve not played an animal before,” says Sir Ben Kingsley, who voices Mowgli’s mentor, the panther Bagheera. “In *Sexy Beast*, I based Don Logan on a Rottweiler. Does that count?” Conversely, he pictured Bagheera as a kind of British regimental officer. “The *lingua franca* of the film are people’s own voices,” he says.

Meanwhile, Idris Elba, who voices Shere Khan, discussed with Favreau the characteristics of a tiger. “We thought about the menace of the character and tried to bring that to life,” says Elba. For Kaa, Favreau saw an opportunity to dilute the testosterone level of the original by adding Scarlett Johansson into the mix. “You can’t draw a lot of expression into a snake and have it still look photo-real,” he says. “Scarlett’s voice is a really interesting balance of dangerous and seductive. It’s a very effective combo.”

Christopher Walken came in to offer his off-kilter cadence to King Louie, the Jungle VIP. Disney created Louie as a swinging orangutan, voiced by popular singer-trumpeter Louis Prima. The problem for Favreau, given his desire to remain location accurate, is that orangutans are not native to India. Rather than eliminate an iconic character, Favreau’s research uncovered a Gigantopithecus, a yeti-like forerunner of the orangutan that once inhabited the subcontinent. To animate Louie, Favreau turned to Weta Digital. “I hear they are pretty good with monkeys,” Favreau quips.

Unsurprisingly, scattling orangutans didn’t feature in Kipling’s original text. But King Louie is at the heart of the original film’s best sequence, and there was no question that he had to appear in this version too. Yet, as much as Favreau wanted to recreate the energy and enchantment of Disney, he also wanted to cleave closer to the source than cuddly Uncle Walt ever dreamed of.

MOWGLI HAS TWO FATHERS ON SCREEN

— Bagheera and Baloo — and a pair of daddies off-screen, too — Disney and Kipling. Favreau is aiming to blend the colour and fun of Disney with the darkness and drama of Kipling’s stories. How will he unify two seemingly incompatible flavours?

“That’s the million-dollar question,” he smiles. “If I guess right, we’re great. That’s the trickiest part of this project — more than the technical stuff.”

Kingsley describes his director as “bright enough and clever enough to hold that beautiful fine balance between the innovative genius of Disney and the Victorian, muted imagination of Kipling.”

Amid the moral messages, Kipling’s stories are marked by violence (“Ten minutes later little Kotick did not recognise his little friends any more, for their skins were ripped off from the nose to the hind flippers”), and that cast doubt on the hoped-for PG rating, especially once magnified in live action, 3D and IMAX. Favreau is turning to classic Disney to gauge the tone, citing how *Pinocchio* and *Bambi* can spin from exuberance to intensity on a dime. “Your palms will sweat,” he assures us.

Perhaps the biggest challenge faced by Favreau is how to interpolate the songs. From *I Wan’na Be Like You* to *Trust In Me*, through *That’s What Friends Are For* to *The Bare Necessities*, >



The Jungle Book has the strongest songbook of any Disney flick. "I had the soundtrack album on vinyl," enthuses Elba. "It's so embedded in my memory." But can a believable animal kingdom, where death is always just a tiger's pounce away, really encompass song and dance routines?

"You don't want it to be a musical, so people feel characters can't get hurt or killed," says Favreau. "But these songs are classics. There's not as much music as in the original, but the key moments that you're looking for, you'll find we honoured."

Disney's musical heritage is one difference between Favreau's *Jungle Book* and the Andy Serkis-directed adaptation, currently titled *Jungle Book: Origins* and due October 2017. Serkis will use the performance-capture techniques he has helped spearhead, and will play Baloo alongside Christian Bale (Bagheera), Cate Blanchett (Kaa) and Benedict Cumberbatch (Shere Khan). This coincidence of competing projects has hit Favreau before, both as actor (he was in *Deep Impact* up against *Armageddon*) and director (Bradley Cooper's *Burnt* was in development at the same time as *Chef*) but he isn't too concerned.

"You don't do yourself any favours thinking about anything that distracts you from making the movie," he says. "You have no control over it. It's my gig to get in there and fly the plane. Someone else can worry about air traffic control."

It's customary for directors coming off the back of huge, technically challenging movies to say that their next film will be something simple, indie and cheap. But, emboldened by his *Jungle Book* education in high-tech, Favreau remains defiant. "Maybe I'll dive back into something like this," he offers. "Now that I know what I am doing." And with that he is off to check the dynamic range. The ex-Luddite has left the building. ■

THE JUNGLE BOOK IS OUT ON APRIL 15 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN A FUTURE ISSUE.

Top: Mowgli keeping it hyper-real with Scarlett Johansson's snake Kaa and... Above: ... Ben Kingsley's black panther Bagheera.

THE RELEASE RACE

WHAT DOES HISTORY REVEAL ABOUT *THE JUNGLE BOOK*'S CHANCES AGAINST NEXT YEAR'S RIVAL *JUNGLE BOOK: ORIGINS*?



DR. STRANGELOVE

(JANUARY 29, 1964)

VS.

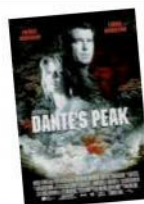
FAIL SAFE

(OCTOBER 7, 1964)



Columbia Studios did battle with itself in 1964, producing Stanley Kubrick and Sidney Lumet's accounts of a nuclear stand-off, which came out within a fortnight of each other.

THE RESULT Box-office figures for *Fail Safe* aren't available but it's safe to say the stiletto-sharp Kubrickian satire, out first on Kubrick's insistence, won out over Lumet's carefully crafted drama.



DANTE'S PEAK

(FEBRUARY 1997)

VS.

VOLCANO

(APRIL 1997)



Pierce Brosnan and Tommy Lee Jones both battled mucho magma and 'pyroclastic flows' within a couple of months of each other in 1997.

THE RESULT Neither exactly blew the top off the box office but erupting first no doubt helped *Dante's Peak* to a take of \$178 million while *Volcano* took \$122 million.



DEEP IMPACT

(MAY 1998)

VS.

ARMAGEDDON

(JULY 1998)



In 1998, Hollywood sent a brace of space boulders hurtling towards the planet's box office. Mimi Leder's *Deep Impact* was a tense take on the social effects of impending annihilation. *Armageddon* was directed by Michael Bay.

THE RESULT Second-out-the-gate Bayhem won out with over half a billion dollars to *Deep Impact*'s \$350 million.



CAPOTE

(FEBRUARY 2005)

VS.

INFAMOUS

(OCTOBER 2005)



You wait decades for a biopic of the elfin scion of New Journalism, then two come at once. 2006 saw Philip Seymour Hoffman and Toby Jones both playing the mercurial *In Cold Blood* author.

THE RESULT Sadly for the excellent Toby Jones, first-off-the-blocks *Capote* won, with an Oscar for Hoffman and box office of \$20 million to *Infamous*' \$1 million. **ADAM SMITH**

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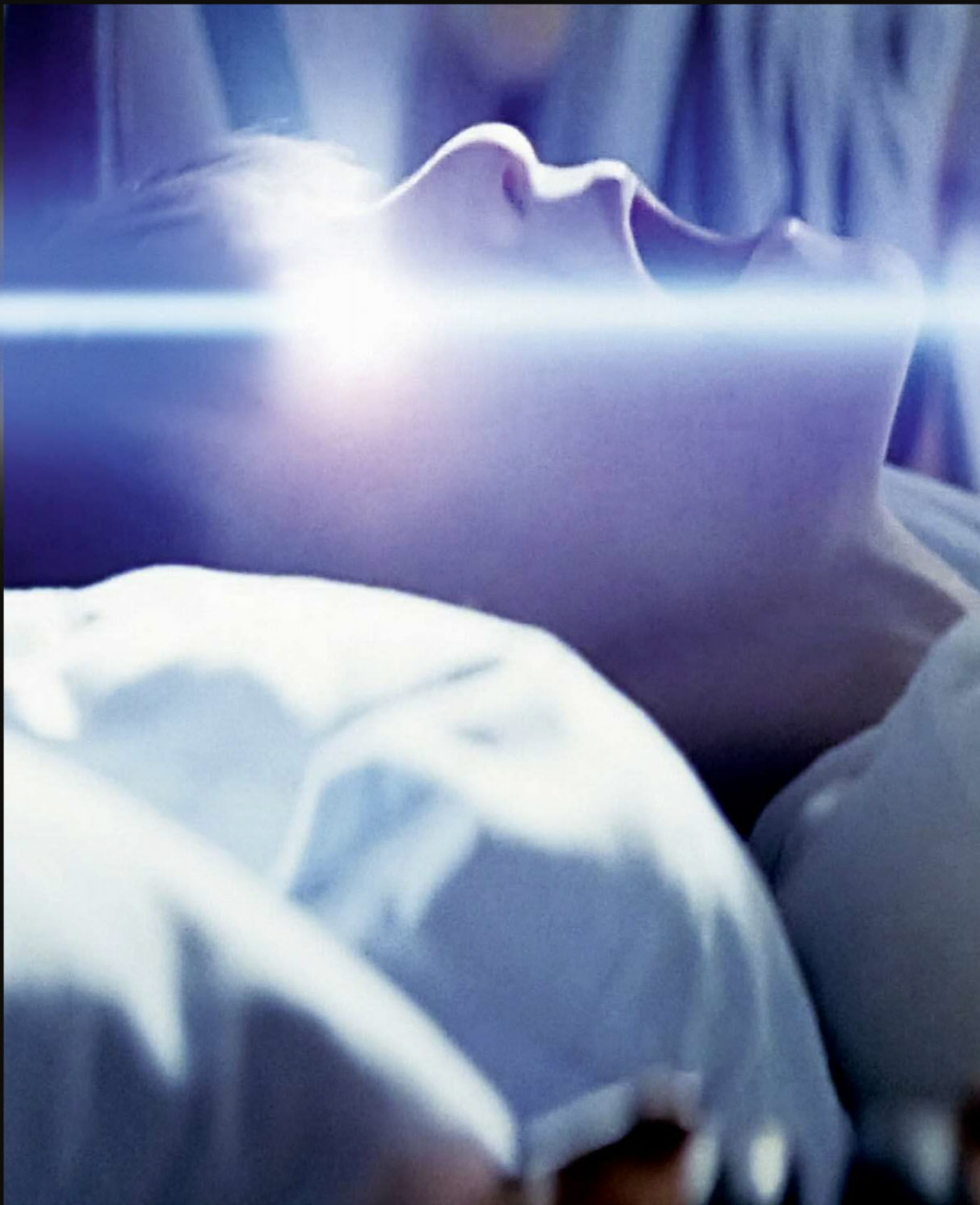
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THE LIGHT FANTASTIC

How indie wunderkind **Jeff Nichols** crafted a blockbuster-rivalling sci-fi thriller without compromising his vision

WORDS DAMON WISE



Jeff Nichols likes to compare *Midnight Special* to a matryoshka doll — those wooden Russian nesting figurines that open up to reveal smaller and smaller versions of themselves. Except this one goes in reverse. “It starts with a kind of indie feel,” he explains, “and then it gets progressively bigger and bigger — until it practically falls off the edges of the frame.”

After three rural dramas set in his home state of Arkansas, the last one being the Matthew McConaughey-starring *Mud* (2012), it’s about time Nichols, 37, entered the big league, and his latest is his most ambitious movie to date. A smart, sci-fi-skewed chase thriller, it aims for the throwback vibe of the films he grew up with and loved. It has the warm synth fuzz of John Carpenter’s romantic sci-fi *Starman* and the retro lens flare of vintage Spielberg. But *Midnight Special* not only speaks the language of the modern blockbuster, it also fits snugly into Nichols’ existing filmography; while there are shoot-outs, car chases and strange alien elements, he made sure, every step of the way, to never forget his roots.

“YOU HAVE TO FILL UP THE TANK”

While finishing his last movie, *Mud*, Nichols found himself with no ideas in reserve for the first time since graduating. As Mark Twain, one of his heroes, used to say, “You have to fill up the tank,” so, looking back, he noticed a theme running through his projects: love. His first, 2007’s *Shotgun Stories*, about a deadly small-town blood feud, “is about love between brothers — a deep love, and when one is taken away it’s painful.” The love in *Take Shelter* (2011), about a depressive father tormented by visions of the apocalypse, “is about marriage and commitment”, while *Mud* is about “fleeting teenage love” and the cyclical nature of heartbreak. “I’m dealing with all these personal feelings in my life,” he says, “and I use the films as a way to exorcise them.”

The inspiration for *Midnight Special* was another kind of love. “My son, when he was about a year old, started to have a seizure, and my wife and I flipped out. We threw him in the car, I was holding him — no seatbelt — and we ran through red lights as we drove to the hospital. We were runnin’ through the hospital and I was yellin’, ‘My baby can’t breathe...!’” It turned out to be a febrile seizure, not

life-threatening but scary all the same. “What it very pointedly made me understand,” he says, “is that my life is no longer my own, and now that I have a child, there is a piece of me out in the world that I have no control over. So as a filmmaker I thought, ‘I gotta talk about that.’ Because that’s the most intense fuckin’ feeling I’ve had in my entire life.”

“IT’S ABOUT BELIEF IN SOMETHING YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND”

Nichols was a child of the ’80s, a boom time for sci-fi, but in particular the subgenre in which The Man was the bad guy. “I really looked at those films — specifically government sci-fi chase films like *Starman*, *Close Encounters* and *E. T.* — looking structurally at how the narratives unfolded, and also the aesthetic of those films, the colours, the lens flares, the general feeling and tone,” he says. “I also noticed that the aliens weren’t necessarily malevolent creatures. These stories are to do with us trying to understand an outsider.”

When it came to casting the lead, Nichols’ first instinct was to turn to his regular leading man, Michael Shannon, who claims the director initially skipped the sci-fi bit of the pitch. “Jeff just

Michael Shannon’s Roy with his superpowered son Alton (Jaeden Lieberher).



Top: Jeff Nichols on location, directing Joel Edgerton and Shannon. **Above:** Adam Driver's Sevier and Edgerton's Lucas. **Right:** Great power comes with great stress for Alton.

described it as a chase movie, “Shannon tells us. “He said, ‘I’m writing this thing with you in a car, being chased.’ And that was it. He didn’t even mention the boy.”

The boy is Alton Meyer (Jaeden Lieberher), a child with special powers who has been snatched away from a cult by his father, Roy (Shannon). The cult wants the boy back, but the government, which fears his explosive supernatural powers make him a threat to national security, is already on the case, in the form of Adam Driver’s intuitive NSA agent, Sevier. Meanwhile, Roy, aided by his friend Lucas (Joel Edgerton) and Alton’s mother Sarah (Kirsten Dunst), believes the boy has a secret destiny that they must help him to fulfil — even though they don’t know what it is. “It’s about belief in something you don’t understand,” says Nichols. “What would *you* do if you knew your child was bound for somewhere you couldn’t follow?”

“MICHAEL SHANNON IS A RAW NERVE”

In the flesh, there seems little to connect Jeff Nichols and the actor who has appeared in all his films so far: where Nichols is garrulous, literate and boyish, given to grinning from ear to ear,

Shannon projects the intensity of a human storm cloud, tall, taciturn and darkly foreboding. Nevertheless, Shannon has become the director’s unlikely alter ego.

“Y’know, I began writing these parts not knowing Mike real well,” Nichols says. “I was just writing versions of myself, and then for some reason casting him as me. I’ve always seen Mike, from *Shotgun Stories* on, as this hard-to-read, tough person who is extremely sensitive and extremely emotional. Oddly enough, that’s how I see him as a person in real life now, the more I’ve gotten to know him.”

He describes Shannon as “a raw nerve. It makes all the sense in the world that he’d play this part, which to me is very emotional. He’s just a guy who wants to protect his family, which seems to be a recurring theme for me. I know everyone’s always gonna look at Mike as the bad guy, ‘cause that’s the easy play. But he’s great at that too. Mike Shannon can pretty much do anything.”

Casting Shannon also gave Nichols access to the coffers of Warner Bros., home to indie-turned-A-list directors like Christopher Nolan and Tim Burton, which actually bankrolled the film for the bargain budget of just under \$20 million.

“There were a couple of reasons I went to Warner Bros., but one of the main ones was because I thought they’d understand Mike,” Nichols says. “They’d already, to a degree, invested in him, in terms of making him one of the main characters in *Man Of Steel*, so my hope was that they’d get it. Luckily they did.”

“I’M A SUCKER FOR FLATTERY”

Although *Mud* came in at an even more economical \$10 million, Nichols’ last film landed a peak, pre-Oscar Matthew McConaughey and post-Oscar Reese Witherspoon in two of its leading roles. This one combines stars from *Man Of Steel*, *Spider-Man*, *Exodus* and *The Force Awakens*. Nichols has proved a master of drawing in big-name casts on small-scale movies.

The secret, says Nichols’ long-time producer Sarah Green, is a mixture of two things. “Firstly, the material speaks for itself,” she says. “Jeff is an extremely good writer and the scripts read really well. And then, when you meet him, you immediately feel comfortable. You know you’re talking to a guy who understands filmmaking and knows how to talk to actors. If they have any questions, a meeting always does the trick.”



Nichols puts much of his success in attracting A-list casts down to luck. “I’ve been really fortunate not to encounter any bad actors, in terms of prima donnas,” he says, “and I really respond to that. One, because I’m a sucker for flattery. But, two, because they wanna do the work.”

He cites Dunst, who auditioned for Roy’s estranged wife Sarah, herself a fugitive from the cult. “She put herself on camera and we were like, ‘Wow, that does *not* look like Kirsten Dunst.’ She had no make-up on, she looked kinda rough, and she looked like the part. She just really wanted to do it — and that goes a really long way with me.”

Adam Driver, he admits, was another happy accident. “That was a role I couldn’t figure out. I wanted to combine Richard Dreyfuss from *Jaws* and François Truffaut from *Close Encounters* to create this weird character. We were at Warner Bros. when somebody mentioned Adam, and I didn’t know much about him. I hadn’t seen much of *Girls*, so I started looking into him. We got on the phone and, very surprisingly, he knew about my films, and he just said yes. I didn’t know this guy, but I think he is going to be one of the biggest movie stars in the world. I feel like we are a small blip on a very large radar for that guy.”

“I THOUGHT, ‘HOW WOULD THAT REALLY LOOK?’”

Despite tackling a cinematic genre that traditionally demands big budgets, Nichols took the same factual approach that he did with his low-budget dramas. “I tried to take the same care, even with the fantastical elements,” he says. “How would that *really* look, how would that really play out?”

Putting realism first meant there was little temptation to go crazy with CGI. Shannon, an actor who’s worked with everyone from Werner Herzog to Michael Bay, describes the process of making *Midnight Special* as “organic”.

“We were never on a green screen or anything, we were pretty much always on location,” he says. “We were out in nature, in the elements, and it was beautiful. Even though it has that science-fiction element, it’s still very much of the earth, which is one of the things I love about Jeff and his movies and working with him — he has a very strong connection to nature, which I appreciate.”

While watching the pennies (or cents) was primarily Sarah Green’s responsibility, she says Nichols was “mindful” that he needed to be careful

about how they were spent. And with the budget they had, he couldn’t rely on his VFX artists to do everything digitally. As a result, the effects are partly computer-generated, partly in-camera. In pre-production, Nichols meticulously planned out his car chases with stunt co-ordinator Scott Rogers, using toy cars on a desktop. And for the blue light that pours from Alton Meyer’s eyes, he took an equally practical approach.

“We had these goggles with high-powered LEDs in the lenses, that were made between the prop guys and the visual-effects folks, that actually lit up on the set,” Green tells us. “Of course, they were enhanced in post-production. But it created the effect on the set sufficiently for the whole thing to work.”

Enlisting the LA-based Hydraulic VFX team, run by brothers Greg and Colin Strause, who created *Take Shelter*’s apocalyptic nightmares, Nichols also consulted ‘world builder’ Alex McDowell, a new media artist who, among other things, helped conceptualise the world of *Minority Report*. Their work helps take the film into its overtly fantastical final act, albeit with effects that respect the naturalism of Nichols’ original intent. “There were certainly moments

Clockwise from top left: Alton with his goggles; Unleashing his superpowers; With on-screen parents Shannon and Kirsten Dunst.



when the actors had to react to things that weren't there," says Green. "But we were in practical locations, so everything else *was* there. The ground under their feet was there, the thing they had to possibly escape into — that was all real. It was a good, straightforward mix."

"I NEVER KNOW HOW MY MOVIES ARE GOING TO DO"

Nichols seems very relaxed for a man facing potentially the biggest box-office hit of his career, a movie which you would imagine other directors anxiously treating as their big studio calling card. Indeed, rather than holding out for any offers to come his way, Nichols has already shot and wrapped his next film, *Loving*, the story of a mixed-race couple (Edgerton and Ruth Negga) who challenged the racist laws of Virginia in the 1950s by getting married. In contrast to its predecessor, it is defiantly non-mainstream. "It's not a big career plan," says Green, who doesn't rule out a return to studio work, "we just work on a case-by-case basis."

Nichols says he never knows how his movies are going to perform. "With *Take Shelter*, I was anxious about the

world and anxious about the film. I just kept waiting for the bad reviews. Luckily not too many came. But *Mud* did great. It made money. Real people liked that movie, not just the film *Illuminati*, and for whatever reason, they keep talking about it."

Regardless, he's proud of *Midnight Special*. Despite the extent of his ambition and the size of his budget — not to mention the involvement of a major studio — he stuck to his resolve and didn't compromise.

"They do these screenings — they call 'em 'friends and family screenings' — at the studio, where you try to get some feedback," he says, "but it's kind of insulated to the community at Warner Bros.. I saw a note card from one and it said, 'I can't believe Warner Bros. is making this film.' I *think* they mean it as a compliment! But they've been great, man. They let us do our thing and supported us every step of the way. So if people don't like the movie — which is entirely possible — they're not likin' a Jeff Nichols film. It's not because of some weird outside influence."

He laughs. "That's the footing I wanna be on." ■

MIDNIGHT SPECIAL IS OUT ON APRIL 8 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN THE NEXT ISSUE.

CARPENTER COVERS

MIDNIGHT SPECIAL IS A TRIBUTE TO JOHN CARPENTER'S *STARMAN*. HERE ARE MORE RIFFS ON JC'S OEUVRE...



THE HATEFUL EIGHT (2016)

Tarantino cast the star of *The Thing*, as well as using its music cues and ambience. "It's the only movie I showed the cast," he says, adding, "And *Reservoir Dogs* was very much influenced by *The Thing*."



SCREAM (1996)

Carpenter directed buddy Wes Craven in 1993's *Body Bags*; three years later, Craven littered *Scream* with references to *Halloween*, from Billy Loomis' surname to a glimpse of the film on a TV.



LOCKOUT (2012)

Not so much an affectionate tribute to *Escape From New York* as an aggressive rip-off. This Luc Besson sci-fi film has so many similarities to the 1981 classic that Carpenter sued. And won.



GHOSTS OF MARS (2001)

Carpenter pays homage to himself when Pam Grier's character asks, "Who goes there?" (The title of the story *The Thing* was based on.) It's also basically a retelling of *Assault On Precinct 13*. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**





MARVEL'S DARK KNIGHT

**Jon Bernthal is The Punisher, tooling up for
Daredevil Season 2. No complaints?
Exactly**

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT ILLUSTRATION OLLY GIBBS

Something very unusual happened on June 9 last year. Something virtually unprecedented. An actor was cast as a comic-book character... and the internet approved. Usually, as soon as a filmmaker or studio dares to cast a comic-book superhero in flesh and blood, the protests begin. Both Jared Leto and Heath Ledger got flak when cast as The Joker ("Heath Ledger has the charisma of a lettuce leaf," sniped one poster on Reddit in July 2006). More recently, Benedict Cumberbatch-as-Doctor-Strange incurred ire. And spare a thought for poor Ben Affleck, who faced a change.org petition when he was announced as the new Batman.

Yet, scan tweets from the day Bernthal was cast as The Punisher, and there's lots of squealing, lots of caps, lots of excited F-bombs. The overwhelming consensus: by casting Bernthal as the cop-turned-vigilante in Season 2 of its Netflix show *Daredevil*, Marvel had chosen wisely.

Here was an actor who'd made his name playing grim and gritty in *The Walking Dead*. A man with a thousand-yard stare, don't-fuck-with-me aura and nose broken, six ways to Sunday. Someone who, in essence, looked like he'd stepped straight off the page of a *Punisher* comic.

"Part of me would rather everybody had said, 'That's the worst, that guy sucks!'" says Bernthal. "It's tremendously humbling. I just want to get this right. I walk down the streets of New York all the time and people are telling me, 'Don't fuck this up.' That response did not embolden me, or let me hold my chin high. It just said, 'Time to go to work, motherfucker.'"

A NEW YORK COP FINDS

his life in tatters when his wife and child are shot dead. Consumed by grief, he becomes a death-dealing revenge merchant, hunting criminals with a skull on his chest, a gun in his hand and hatred in his heart. His name is Frank Castle, but he calls himself The Punisher.

If the story feels familiar, that's because The Punisher has been an integral part of the Marvel universe since he was created, initially as a *Spider-Man* villain, by Gerry Conway and John Romita in 1974. It might also be because it's been on the big screen already — three times, in fact. Each time, a different actor has played Castle.



Jon Bernthal, armed and ready to punish.

First there was Dolph Lundgren, with dyed black hair and a dead-eyed stare, in a cheapo 1989 effort put out by New World Pictures. Let's just say it's a good thing Twitter wasn't around when Dolph had a go at the role. Or a bad thing, depending on your point of view.

Then along came Thomas Jane in 2004's *The Punisher*, which more openly embraced its origin, including the skull costume. It was fun, but a box-office fizzle. And finally, in 2008, the spectacularly violent and blackly comedic *Punisher War Zone* saw Ray Stevenson shoot, punch, stab and blow up everything that moved. It's something of a cult favourite now but crashed and burned commercially, after which the rights quietly reverted to Marvel Studios, who decided that the perfect vehicle for The Punisher was the murky, morally ambiguous and violent world of *Daredevil*.

You could argue that Castle is a one-dimensional character who glorifies

violence, who has been roadtested and found wanting, that it's three strikes and out. Equally, you could argue that none of the previous Punisher iterations or actors have had the time, or the inclination, to dive deep into the roiling grief that makes Frank Castle tick, to find those extra dimensions. Well, 13 episodes of a television series solves that problem. As does Bernthal. "I'm giving it everything I have," he says. "This character and his philosophies and the ideas behind it are tremendously important to me."

Bernthal will happily declare that acting saved his life: "Growing up, I was attracted to danger and to trouble. This art, this craft, this work gave me direction. All of a sudden, that same wildness ended up being one of my greatest weapons."

It's noticeable in virtually all of Bernthal's roles, even gentler fare like *Me And Earl And The Dying Girl*. This is a man who was asked to audition for



both Rick Grimes and Shane Walsh in *The Walking Dead*, but impressed very strongly upon then-showrunner Frank Darabont that the knotty, complex Shane was the only option for him.

"It was the character of a lifetime," he explains. "At this point in my life I'd just played Al Capone in *Night At The Museum 2*. A character like Shane was what I trained for, what I went to drama school for."

The Walking Dead put Bernthal on the map. From that you can trace lines to Martin Scorsese's *The Wolf Of Wall Street* (where he improvised the scene in which he sells a pen to Leonardo DiCaprio's Jordan Belfort), and David Ayer's *Fury*, the shoot for which was so intense that Bernthal didn't see his family until it wrapped. That included his newborn child. "I basically met my son when he was eight months," he says. "You could have put ten babies in front of me and I wouldn't have known which one was mine! I go dark for the first

From top: With Charlie Cox in *Daredevil*; As Shane Walsh, alongside Andrew Lincoln and Sarah Wayne Callies, in *The Walking Dead*; Giving 100 per cent in 2014's *Fury*.

couple of months when I try to find the character. We all have our methods."

For *The Punisher*, Bernthal's method was simple. First, he auditioned by taping a scene with his friend Tom Holland, coincidentally enough the boy who would become the new Spider-Man. Then, role secured, he "went dark". Late every night, for weeks before filming began, Bernthal strapped on a backpack filled with weights and walked the deserted streets, he says, "from Brooklyn Bridge on", trying to find Frank Castle.

"Here's a guy who's had the thing he cares about most in the world taken from him forever," says Bernthal. "It's important not to spend your nights with the creature comforts of a hotel and going to restaurants and partying." And no, nobody messed with him. Probably because he looks just like Frank Castle.

A BRIGHT NOVEMBER

morning in Brooklyn, and *Empire* has come to the set of *Daredevil* Season 2 (working title: *Ringside*) to witness Jon

"I GO DARK FOR A COUPLE OF MONTHS WHILE I FIND THE CHARACTER."

Bernthal in the act of not fucking this up.

Today's scene is a crucial moment in a crucial episode towards the tail-end of the season, so we'll go light on the context. Here's what you need to know: there's a boat, and on that boat is a bad man. But he's about to meet a badder man: Frank Castle.

While he waits for director Stephen Surjik to yell "Action", Bernthal stands outside the door of the 'boat' (really a series of cabins constructed on a soundstage). Earlier, when *Empire* chatted to him, he was reclining on a sofa in a green room, clad in civvies, with a *Friday The 13th* baseball cap on his head. Now, he's head-to-toe in black (no skull just yet; expect that to materialise around the season's end), with a black eye blooming across his face. He looks exactly like the kind of guy you'd cross the street then hide in a doorway to avoid if you saw him walking through Manhattan in the middle of the night.

Surjik yells the magic word. The

actor playing Man Justifiably Terrified By The Punisher (NB: may not be the character's actual name) wrenches open the door and limps through the cabin into his chambers. After a beat, Bernthal — assault rifle in the ready position — follows. Gunfire is exchanged, and the scene ends with *The Punisher* standing over the man as he begs for his life. Bernthal takes out a handgun and puts it in the man's mouth. Lost in character, Bernthal calls the man a "cocksucker". "I think it probably took Marvel a little bit of getting used to!" he laughs later.

And then, just as Frank is about to Castle the poor chap, in barges Charlie Cox as that do-gooding Daredevil. "GET OUTTA HERE, RED," yells Bernthal, a line which tells us that, though their methods are different, *The Punisher* and Daredevil have formed an alliance of sorts. What happens next — Castle leaping up and pushing Daredevil out of the room — tells us that alliance is fairly brittle. In layman's terms, it's about to kick off.

"Frank is so filled with rage and despair that this idea of a guy prancing

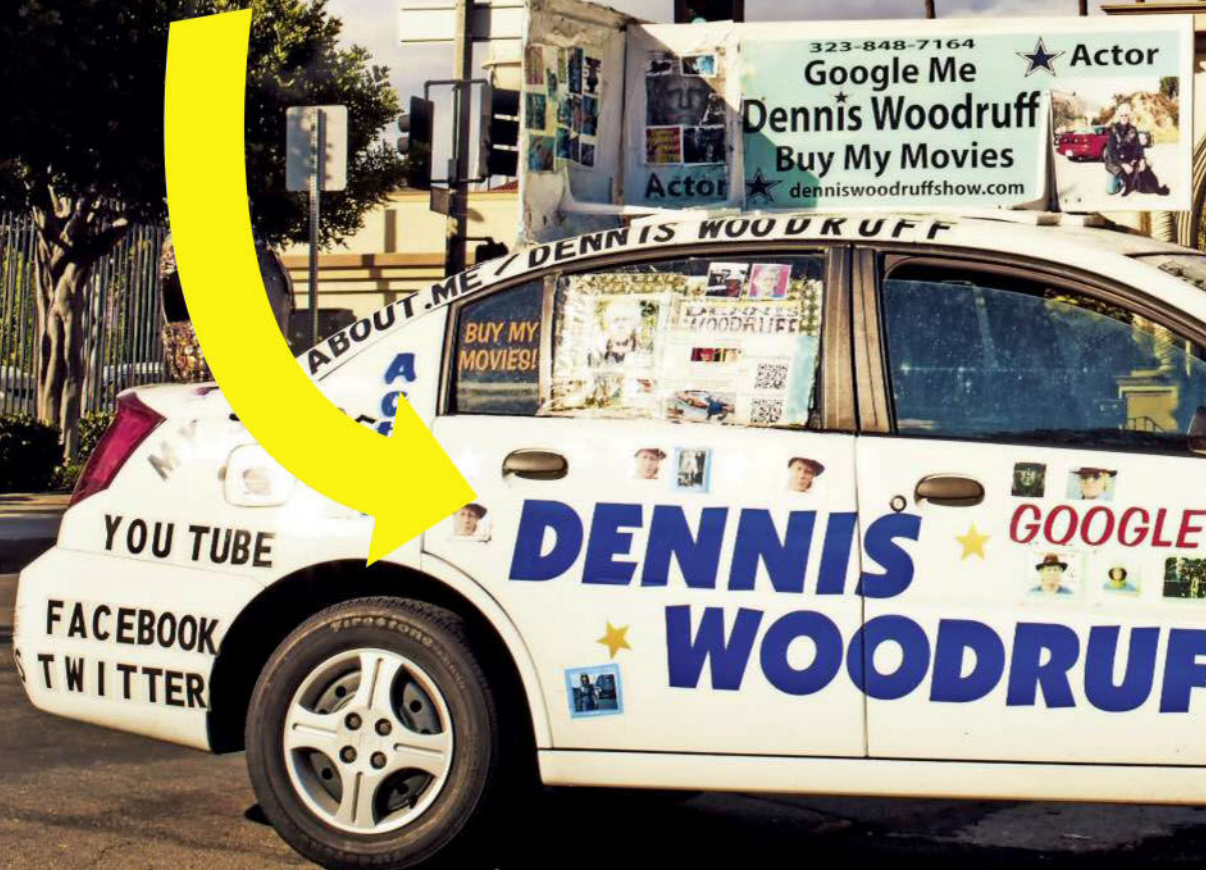
around in a costume with little horns beating up bad guys is absurd to him," says Bernthal. "It's ripe for a character like Frank to come in and shit on that. What's really interesting is that these guys are absolute enemies, but they start to understand each other."

The second season hasn't streamed yet but already there are rumours of a spin-off — so Bernthal might finally be the first to play Castle more than once.

"We're the last to know about those things," he laughs, with the air of a man who isn't afraid of much but is willing to make an exception for non-disclosure agreements. "But this guy is very much burned into my heart and soul. I think about him all the time. And I look at it the same way Frank would look at it. I'm a soldier, man. If they call on me, I'll stand to attention and I'll be ready." The internet will be pleased. ■

DAREDEVIL SEASON 2 IS ON NETFLIX FROM MARCH 18.

MEET HOLLYWOOD'S GREATEST FAILURE



Actor, director, ferocious self-promoter — **Dennis Woodruff** is stitched into the very fabric of Hollywood. And yet, despite decades of trying, he still can't catch a break. *Empire* joins him in LA to find out why the hell not

WORDS SAM ROWE PORTRAITS STEVE SCHOFIELD



AND DAISY

It was Christmas, 1957. After neatly wrapping the contents of his toy box — to dole out to family members in lieu of proper gifts — five year-old Dennis Woodruff was taken aside by his grandmother. “Be proud of the fact you are a Woodruff,” she told him.

“You are a very special person, don’t let anybody ever tell you that you’re not.” Motioning towards the window of her extravagant home, located deep in the Hollywood Hills, she added: “Your grandfather built Hollywoodland.”

Indeed, his grandad was real estate developer S. H. Woodruff. In the 1920s he, along with a crack team of eager investors, transformed a humble canyon in the foothills of Los Angeles into a beacon of prosperity, embodied by a row of 43-foot-high sheet-metal letters that, as night fell, lit up the skyline: HOLLYWOODLAND.

While Woodruff Sr.’s place in history would be relegated to a footnote (his “crowning achievement” sullied by the Wall Street Crash, floods, fire, the loss of “LAND” to bad upkeep and in 1932 actress Peg Entwistle leaping from the ‘H’ to her death), his sign remains a potent symbol of the entertainment industry below.

As for young Dennis Woodruff, it was here, peering out of the glass, in the shadow of his grandpa’s sign, that he decided: stardom awaited. After all, Hollywood was his birthright.

SIX DECADES LATER, AND

the 88th Academy Awards are just days from taking place. But while the usual Armani-clad suspects will engage in their time-honoured skirmish in pursuit of a hallowed, 24-carat gold-plated man, there is one Hollywood resident who, as he does every year, will simply watch it on TV.

“I do still wonder why I haven’t been invited to the Academy Awards, it hurts my feelings,” confesses Woodruff, now 63. “In reality I am a bit of an icon in Hollywood,” he reasons. “I live just around the corner and they even have seat-fillers at the awards; why can’t I go?”

Though he does own an Oscar — it’s duct-taped to his car’s bonnet and cast in gold plastic — industry recognition still eludes Woodruff. Yet this isn’t to say he is not a big deal in Hollywood. Far from it.

In a town bloated with an estimated 109,000 actors — of which just 21,000 have had a paying job and 80 per cent are unemployed at any given time — Dennis Woodruff is something of a cult hero. Studio heads recognise his face



Above: Dennis Woodruff attends ‘his’ star on the Walk Of Fame. Only a matter of time. Clockwise from top right: The multi-hyphenate hits the streets of LA for more madcap vox pops; *Spaceman SFX*; the *TMZ*-style *Dennis Woodruff Show*; Fergie as Angelyne (see sidebar, right) and Josh Duhamel as Woodruff on *Hallowe’en*, 2012.

(Woodruff’s been known to stand outside the Paramount gates with his headshot on a stick). Celebrities do, too — *Transformers* actor Josh Duhamel dressed as Woodruff for Hallowe’en in 2012. Other Angelenos, meanwhile, can’t make their mind up on Woodruff’s character. “[He] is possibly LAs most unique (*sic*) creative local legend...” tweeted one last December; “Dennis is the product of distilling all the delusion, fantasy, desperation and wrong headed tenacity in this city into a single human being,” went a post on Reddit. But unlike the lustrous invitees to the Oscars, Woodruff is famous for not being famous. And from a time when the phrase “reality star” didn’t exist.

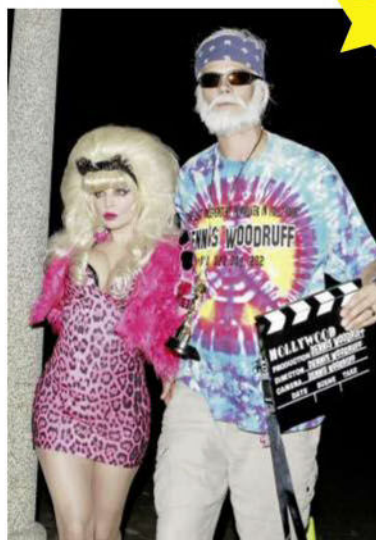
But does this make the spotlight-hungry filmmaker LA’s greatest loser, a victim of the Hollywood establishment’s refusal to recognise his talent? A mere hustler? Or does he illustrate a triumph of spirit, the American Dream in glorious Technicolor, a plucky underdog unafraid

to wrestle the Hollywood machine? One Wednesday in November, *Empire* tracked Woodruff down to his converted garage home to figure out which.

THE FIRST THING YOU

notice about Woodruff’s abode is the fact that “garage” really means just that. In the dimly lit, windowless living room, guns dangle precariously from the wall, ten thick-backed TV-sets are piled upon each other and Daisy — a rescued Chow “mixed with I don’t know what” — snores noisily on the couch. “Did I tell you I’m from outer space?” booms Woodruff, by way of a hello.

As a conversationalist he confuses easily, often spinning off on wild tangents. But Woodruff’s enthusiasm is truly boundless, even if at times we see his self-confidence waver. He habitually asks *Empire* if he’s doing okay, are we getting what we need, has he answered our question properly? Meeting him,



though, you're overwhelmed by his almost childlike zest for life; it is hard not to want him to succeed.

When he was ten years old, Woodruff tells us, he was offered a part in a John Wayne film (he forgets which). 'The Duke' was an acquaintance of his grandfather's, and wee Dennis was, he says, "really good friends with his kids". After he plucked up the courage to ask the Western icon for a role, Wayne wrote Woodruff's mother a letter in response saying he'd found him a part. She was not impressed. "My mum got really mad," says Woodruff, mournfully. "She said I'd bothered him and his family." And just like that, the chance for child stardom slipped through his fingers. "They were trying to shield me from the fact that Hollywood is a very superficial place," Woodruff explains, "and that nobody really cares about you."

But after studying for an arts degree in the early 1980s (his teacher's foremost advice being that he should "go into

drama"), Woodruff decided he could no longer resist his destiny, and sought acting work. Over the next few years he suffered rejection after rejection, his agent, Jack Scagnetti, securing him work only as an extra. So next he dreamed up his "art cars", which, with their many stickered slogans, advertised him as an actor for hire. It was a guerrilla PR campaign he hoped would get him spotted by the very industry figures that would otherwise swerve his advances. Yet still Woodruff had no joy, his cars hardly inspiring confidence in those he was hoping would hire him. It was only then, while he was living in a trailer park and at his lowest ebb, that his brother Scott had a brainwave.

"He said, 'You don't need Hollywood to come knocking on your door — you can do it all yourself,'" remembers Woodruff. It was as if a light had been flicked on in his mind: why wait for an invite from the establishment, when you can create your own industry from the bottom up? ➤

★ STREET LIFE

DENNIS WOODRUFF ISN'T THE ONLY 'CHARACTER' YOU'LL FIND ON THE SIDEWALKS OF HOLLYWOOD...



Angelyne

Singer-actress-model Angelyne grabbed attention during the mid-1980s by promoting herself on Hollywood billboards. Also dabbling in art and even politics (in a 2003 California election she ranked 28th out of 135 candidates), she's referred to herself as a "unicorn icon" and is often seen tooling around LA in her hot pink Corvette.



LA Jesus

Real name Kevin Lee Light, the Messiah-impersonator has wandered the streets of Los Angeles since 2009, posing for photographs and dishing out advice, and even came to London to 'bless' Oxford Street shoppers in 2014. It's still not clear why, and fittingly he refuses to accept cash. In 2012 Aerosmith wrote *Street Jesus* about him.



The Tree Man Of Venice

Stroll along Venice Boardwalk, and you won't mistake Lionel Powell for anyone else. He is the man perched on ten-foot stilts, covered in foliage. So adored in LA that, along with doing charity and environmental gigs, Mr. Tree has performed for Hugh Hefner (and assorted wildlife) at the *Playboy* Mansion.



Harry Perry

Perry's original tunes, electric guitar and oversized turban have rocked Venice Beach boardwalk since 1973, with *Tenacious D In The Pick Of Destiny*, *CSI* and Red Hot Chili Peppers video *The Adventures Of Rain Dance Maggie* among his credits. And did we mention he does all this on rollerskates? Because he does.



Spending what few dollars he had left, Woodruff bought a camera, turned his caravan site into a mini-film set and started production on *Dennis Woodruff The Movie* (1985). A documentary-cum-showreel, it mainly comprised Woodruff's TV appearances — news packages or interviews that focused on him and his wacky billboard cars — interspersed with short, autobiographical films: “all sorts of clips about my life and what I was doing at the time”. Woodruff's neighbour kindly took on editing duties. “It was a hit!” he exclaims, claiming that 4,000 VHS copies were sold out of the boot of his car in just three months.

Today, Woodruff pairs his dogged pursuit of fame with a relentless work ethic. Writer, director, producer and sometime-cameraman of his own DIY motion pictures, Woodruff is a one-man movie empire — a “rebel without a crew”, as he puts it. With his eye to the lens of a battered old camera, Woodruff's record-light blinks ad infinitum, hundreds of LA residents unwittingly becoming background artists — sometimes fully fledged characters — in his movies. With no budget to speak of, any willing co-stars are fellow hard-up actors, performing in return for the exposure, if not as a personal favour to the man himself.

Boasting a vast back catalogue, the Woodruff canon contains 15 movies. Among his best known is *Spaceman* (2007), the frantic tale of an alien's vacation to Hollywood. In its 2011 sequel, *Spaceman Returns*, Woodruff explains, “He comes back a second time, because his planet is dying as all the women have become lesbians” and meets... Dennis Woodruff, playing himself.

But there's more to his oeuvre than such surreal, low-fi capers. There's also

Obsession: Letters To David Lynch (2008), which highlights just how close he's come to taking a step up, and how frustrated he is with his near misses. Woodruff recounts a chance coffee-shop meeting in which he told the *Twin Peaks* director that he was living in his car — the one with “Cast Dennis Woodruff” scrawled on it — and said he would love the chance to prove himself. And so he claims he was cast in a small, speaking role in *Lost Highway* (1997) as a prison inmate, only to be cut (something he didn't discover until he attended the film premiere). “I thought it was my big break,” he says. “I felt betrayed, and I got mad at [Lynch], because I felt I really deserved that part. So to get even at him I thought I'd make a movie to prove I was a better filmmaker.”

A suitably embittered piece, *Obsession* sees ‘David Lynch’ (not the real one) appear and slash ‘Dennis Woodruff’ (the one and only) into several pieces. Once wrapped, Woodruff hand-delivered a copy to Lynch's home. “I never received any feedback,” Woodruff says, with a smirk, though he does say that Lynch briefly spoke with him on his driveway. “He said, ‘You should've told me, I could've helped you with the movie.’” Woodruff pauses, unable to suppress a giggle. “I said, ‘Well, if you did that, it wouldn't be my vision.’”

While such endeavours failed to further his career, the knockback which inspired it barely dented Woodruff's enthusiasm for self-promotion. Undaunted, he has since made documentaries on art, surfing, even a *Spinal Tap*-ish production about himself. Woodruff also shoots a *TMZ*-style YouTube show, in which he approaches members of the LA



Clockwise from above left: Stills from *Spaceman*, *Spaceman Returns*, *Obsession: Letters To David Lynch* and a self-promoting ad. Above: Woodruff with the Hollywood sign — “Hollywoodland” when his grandad helped to develop the area in the 1920s.

public for rapid-fire interviews. Amid the tourists, homeless and joggers, *The Dennis Woodruff Show* has even featured Bill Murray. However, it's worth noting the interview was the result of Woodruff spotting the actor on the sidewalk and thrusting a Handycam in his face.

And it doesn't stop there. Woodruff's job is not done until he presses a DVD-R into his audience's palm. Yours, for “a small donation” of five or ten bucks. In 2011, the *Daily Mail* made the astonishing claim that Woodruff lived in a caravan, yet earned £250,000 every year just from selling his films. While he dismisses the story as “embellished”, Woodruff says his on-the-street patter earns him around “a hundred thousand dollars” annually. Some LA residents dismiss his sales tactics as a mere twist on panhandling, but Woodruff isn't ashamed to show *Empire* how he operates, and suggests we tag along on his next sales excursion.





LATER, BENEATH THE

azure LA sky, Woodruff readies himself for work. Pulling up between a Starbucks and Urban Outfitters on Melrose Avenue, he parks his infamous white Pontiac (licence plate: CAST DW). It's one of many four-wheeled business cards strewn with slogans: "Buy my movies", "Give me the part" and, for the sake of diversity, "Help all animals". He drags a gold lamé jumpsuit over his shirt and paint-flecked shorts, completing the look with a motorcycle helmet adorned with "jewels" (a nod to *Spaceman*).

Today represents Woodruff's first outing in months, owing to a sabbatical (his mum, brother and dog — another Daisy — all passed away during the past year). Woodruff retrieves a fat wedge of merchandise from a satchel, his hands aquiver. But after a few false starts, with passers-by staring straight through the 63 year-old alien on the pavement, it's *Empire* feeling anxious. Perhaps he'd

fare better had he not left Daisy in the car. The vet-sanctioned cone *does* make her appear intergalactic. Then...

"Dennis! S'up dude, how are you?" Bounding out of Starbucks, LA native and budding hip-hop artist Draino Corleno pulls Woodruff in for a firm embrace. Is he a fan? "Hell, yeah! His movies are rad, bro. Dennis is a fucking awesome underground film artist. Seriously, this is the big dude right here." A relieved smile spreads across Woodruff's face. "I told you I was famous," he chirps.

Over lunch (hamburger and fries, plus an extra patty wrapped in tissue for Daisy), Woodruff makes a confession. "I was really nervous when I got out of the car. It's been a while and I had a little stage fright," he says earnestly, between spurts of ketchup. "Now, all of a sudden, I feel relaxed. I love people. I'm a people person. This is what I'm supposed to do."

Although today's take amounts to just \$10, Woodruff insists selling his films

isn't as important to him as advertising himself. Besides, the inheritance from his mother allowed him to invest in a car dealership a few months back, and he'll soon sign the papers for a loft apartment, which he paid for in cash. "When she died," he tells us, "my mom said, 'You better not blow all this money on making movies...'" Woodruff, it appears, is respecting her request, and will be renting out the apartment. He says he prefers to stay in his garage, which costs very little: about \$650 a month rent. Anyway, "Any garage is just a house without windows or a kitchen."

The self-advertising is working, he assures us, and he reels off a list of admirers. The Vice Chairman of NBCUniversal, Ron Meyer, called him "very talented", Woodruff insists. The President of Paramount, "the next Charlie Chaplin". James Cameron once bought a movie. And stars owning Woodruff-original artwork (another passion of his) include Nic Cage, Paris Hilton and Quentin Tarantino.

He also highlights his other notable flirtations with the entertainment industry. Upon being spotted on an LA street by Tom Green, Woodruff was asked to star in a handful of the comedian's skits (including one bonkers sketch whereby Saddam Hussein — played by Woodruff — threatens to blow up Los Angeles, only to be unmasked as a Swedish lobster by Green and skateboarder Tony Hawk). Woodruff was personally invited to cameo in *LA Love*, a music video by self-proclaimed fan Fergie, stealing the show dressed as Spaceman. There was even a nod to his infamous cars in *Volcano* (1997).

Though Woodruff at times seems frustrated by the fact his fame mainly revolves around his lack of it, there's no malice towards the actors who scaled the ladder instead of him, nor those who regard him as an oddball. While out on the sun-baked boardwalks of Los Angeles, his films underarm, Woodruff is simply eager to please and be recognised, relishing every hug, high five and car honk. The cash doesn't hurt, either.

But when a customer exchanges a crumpled \$5 bill in exchange for a DVD, its title scrawled on in Sharpie, they're not investing in independent cinema. Not really. They're placing their faith in Woodruff himself. The underdog who wears a glossy spacesuit, and point-blank refuses to give up his dream. And why would he? Hollywood is in his blood. ■

FOR MORE DENNIS WOODRUFF, HEAD TO
DENNISWOODRUFFSHOW.COM.



THE POWER TRIP

Kevin Spacey reflects on the rise of both nefarious commander-in-chief Frank Underwood in *House Of Cards*, and its revolutionary creator, Netflix

WORDS OLLY RICHARDS PHOTOGRAPHY MARCO GROB



W

When you're prepared to do anything to get there, it often doesn't take long to reach the top.

In 2013, at the opening of Netflix's handsome political drama *House Of Cards*, Frank Underwood was just a party whip, a politician with his eye on the biggest job in the world and a ruthless plan for how to snatch it. Now, as the show begins its fourth season, he is the President of the United States, his path to power stained with the blood of enemies and friends alike. In three years Underwood has gone from just one of the pack to snarling top dog.

It's a rate of ascension echoed by the network that created him, although only one of them killed (in the murderous sense, at least) to get there. Nobody could have imagined precisely how fast and how absolutely Netflix would change the way TV works. Well, except one person, the man who plays Frank Underwood: Kevin Spacey.

"Oh, I believed," says Spacey. "I fully believed [before Season 1 debuted] that we would be making a fourth season of *House Of Cards*. Somewhere deeper down I believed there would someday be a fifth."

Back in 2011, Netflix's DVD rental and streaming service had not even expanded beyond the US and Canada (it would not launch in the UK until January 2012), so it made a bold move when it announced in March of that year that it would start producing its own projects, beginning with a remake of the 1990 British series *House Of Cards*. The possibility that its original productions would become its chief selling point seemed unlikely, as was the idea that it would compete with traditional TV networks like NBC or ABC.

Yet five years later, Netflix has approximately 75 million subscribers, produces more than 40 original shows (not including one-off specials) and has over 50 more in development. *Orange Is The New Black*, *Daredevil*, *Better Call Saul*, *Jessica Jones* and *The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* are big hits, critically and commercially. It has redefined TV

as much as HBO did during the '90s, and many believe it has now surpassed them as the current gold standard of TV. And it all started with *House Of Cards*.

"WELL, I KNEW SOMEONE was going to do it," Spacey tells us. "It was going to be Google or Yahoo! or Facebook... Somebody was going to say, 'We make gazillions of dollars as a portal for entertainment and if we want to compete and not allow HBO to be the only game in town, then we're going to have to start doing original content.' It just made sense."

House Of Cards was a confident, ballsy statement of intent: that Netflix would be aiming for smart, expensive programming with big name-talent (David Fincher directed the first two episodes, and is an executive producer along with Spacey himself). It is well-written, grown-up TV that expects viewers all over the world to be able to keep up with the complexity and shifting morality of US politics, like an evil *West Wing*. It's now such a beloved modern classic that it's odd to think it was ever considered a risky proposition.

Spacey, Fincher and showrunner Beau Willimon had pitched the show to other networks, but there was one reason they went with Netflix. "Every single network except Netflix loved it but wanted us to shoot a pilot," says Spacey. "Netflix said, 'We don't need you to do a pilot, we've run our analytics and people like your movies, people like David's movies. How many do you want to do? And on top of that we'll give you creative freedom.' Which is what we wanted."

It was a financial gamble, with the show reportedly costing much more than the initially projected \$4.5 million per episode. "There were a lot of people who thought we were nuts and thought Netflix was nuts," says Spacey. But the gamble paid off, with *House Of Cards* proving a massive success, drawing in a far greater number of subscribers than anybody had expected.

In the years since, both Underwood and Netflix have risen to the top of their respective games, yet how long can either hold their position unchallenged?

In Season 4, with no higher place to go than the Presidency, Underwood is starting to founder. He's lost the support of the American people, the loyalty of much of his party and, perhaps most importantly, he's without his wife, Claire (Robin Wright), his partner in crime (often literally). During the very final moments of Season 3, Claire finally



Kevin Spacey as Frank Underwood, campaigning for a second term as US President in Season 4.



Underwood finally makes it into the Oval Office in Season 3.



Playing the honest Congressman with wife Claire (Robin Wright, right) and right-hand man Doug Stamper (Michael Kelly, far right) in Season 1.



snapped, marching both out of the White House and out of her marriage.

Spacey insists that relationship has always been at the very heart of *House Of Cards*. "It's so interesting to examine these two figures, who have been extremely successful working in the dark shadows and alleys, who suddenly found themselves in the hottest, whitest spotlight they could be in, and no longer functioning in the way they did," he says. "What we were interested in examining was how does that pressure influence both the way they go about doing what they do and their relationship? Where that will lead?"

Season 4 will see Frank continuing his campaign for a second term as President, without his wife but with his right-hand man, Doug Stamper (Michael Kelly), back at his side. In a sense, Frank is where we first found him, trying to lie and cheat his way into people's trust, except this time he's already got the job he wanted and

NETFLIX WILL CERTAINLY have its figurehead for a while longer.

A fifth season of *House Of Cards* has been confirmed (though without Willimon as showrunner), making Frank Underwood by far the longest-running role of Spacey's career, including stage work.

"Why wouldn't I want to do something that's incredible to do?" he asks. "What am I supposed to be doing, something else? I love the fact that I get to come to work and discover stuff about this character I didn't know. I sometimes hear people talk about, 'Oh, I know everything about my character and I know exactly what my character would do,' and I thank God that I don't feel that way." And can he see himself playing Frank indefinitely?

"Well, not indefinitely," he sighs, a little irritated by the question. "There will come a time when we will make the decision that this will come to an end, but I can't tell you how long that is... You're asking me to speculate so you

"I love the fact that I get to come to work and discover stuff about this character."

his fight is to keep it.

As for Netflix, such is the speed of its success that others have come along and imitated. Amazon has leapt into creating its own content, delivered on its Prime service. It doesn't have the same quantity of series as Netflix, but it has the quality. At last year's Emmy Awards, Amazon took home five prizes to Netflix's four, all for the comedy *Transparent*. It won two Golden Globes, too, for *Mozart In The Jungle*. Netflix won none.

Yet awards don't count for nearly as much as viewing figures. Although it's hard to calculate the number of subscribers to Amazon's video service (Amazon Prime has around 50 million subscribers, but Prime membership is chiefly sold on the promise of free postage on Amazon purchases, so shoppers aren't necessarily watchers), Amazon is one of the wealthiest companies in the world, so has the funds to match Netflix's output. Others are testing the waters, too, with mixed success. Yahoo! created a sixth season of the comedy *Community*, formerly on NBC, for its Yahoo! Screen service, although Yahoo! Screen was shut down in January. Every battle has casualties, but this one isn't over.

can say, 'Kevin Spacey says Season 5's the end.' I have no idea. It could be Season 5, Season 6, Season 7. I can't give you that headline."

That early gamble on Netflix's future has put Spacey at the vanguard of this particular growth industry. He says he lacks the time to watch much TV but admires *Orange Is The New Black* and *Narcos*. As one of the first people to recognise the streaming revolution, what does Spacey think will be the next revolution in storytelling?

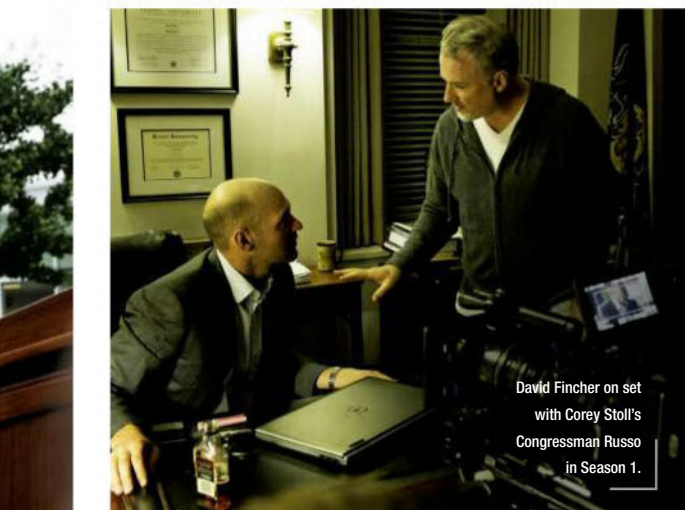
"Augmented reality and [virtual reality]," he says, deadpan, like he's suggested we'll soon be watching TV via chips in our heads from our hover loungers. "I am completely serious," he confirms. "I've seen the future and it's awesome. I'm very involved in the VR world, so I believe in it, and I think augmented reality is the future and we will see over the next four or five years what a dynamic place that will be for storytelling, entertainment, sports..."

He's backed the right horse once. You may want to go and buy some shares in AR right now. ■

HOUSE OF CARDS SEASON 4 IS ON NETFLIX FROM MARCH 4.



Spacey's Underwood stepping up to Vice President in Season 2.



David Fincher on set with Corey Stoll's Congressman Russo in Season 1.

A woman with short blonde hair, wearing a long, sleeveless, high-necked red dress and matching long gloves, stands on a white ledge overlooking a swimming pool. She is holding a small glass in her right hand, from which a spray of liquid is being emitted. The background features a modern building with large glass windows reflecting the pool and surrounding area. The word "Tough" is overlaid in large white letters.

Tough

Act

The characters Helen Mirren plays have one thing in common: you wouldn't mess with them. No, sir. And her latest may be the most formidable yet

WORDS HELEN O'HARA PORTRAITS MATTHEW BROOKES

Facing a moral
quandary as *Eye In
The Sky*'s Colonel
Katherine Powell.



You'll search long and hard to find a major acting award in the English-speaking world that Helen Mirren has not won, whether for film (*The Queen* bagged her the Oscar, BAFTA and Golden Globe), TV (she ruled the Emmys with *Prime Suspect* and *Elizabeth I*) or theatre (*The Audience* saw her receive Tony and Olivier awards). But the Essex girl who became the entertainment world's go-to monarch has interests that range far beyond the sensible shoes of Elizabeth II or *Prime Suspect*'s Jane Tennison. She's played assassins (*RED*, *Shadowboxer*), sorcerers (*Excalibur*, *The Tempest*) and cold-blooded manipulators (*The Long Good Friday*, *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife & Her Lover*), and virtually every major Shakespearean heroine on stage. You don't have to look too hard though to find a common thread. Her characters tend to be badass.

Which, if we're honest, makes the prospect of meeting her rather intimidating (and *Empire* doesn't scare easy). It's with freshly polished shoes and carefully ironed clothing that we approach the quiet production office in New York's Soho where Mirren is filming publicity material for her latest film, *Eye In The Sky*. It's the account of a military operation in Nairobi, Kenya, to capture dangerous Al-Shabaab militants. Colonel Katherine Powell (Mirren) is leading the operation from England, commanding a US drone officer (Aaron Paul) and Kenyan ground troops working with special operations officer Jama Farah (*Captain Phillips*' Barkhad Abdi). But Powell must also answer to higher, political authorities, via her Westminster liaison (Alan Rickman), when the mission changes from 'capture' to 'kill'.

As we're shepherded inside a small glass room, Mirren is debating *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* with her *Eye In The Sky* director, Gavin Hood. As it turns out, we didn't need to be nervous. Mirren proves a funny and eloquent interview, poking fun at her own reputation as a *grande dame* — especially with talk of her need for a 'trophy library'...

In *Eye In The Sky* you spend almost the entire movie in a darkened room, which must make for an odd shoot.

Yes, I was in a real concrete bunker for two or three weeks, completely separate from everyone else. Then Aaron and the pilots came in; then the politicians. I was playing basically with Gavin saying everyone else's lines. I never got to work with Alan **●**; I was long gone when he arrived. It was a great pity.

What was it about this character that drew you in?

It wasn't really the character. Yes, I'd never played a military commander before; that was interesting. But the movie is not about Katherine at all; it's about the decision she has to make. It was the story that I thought was fantastic. I didn't really mind where I was in the film; I just wanted to be a part of it.

It raises some fascinating moral questions about what damage we can accept to prevent greater harm.

I would love there to be a poll at the end, or an audience discussion of who is right and who is wrong. Films like absolutes: happily ever after, the good guy kills the bad guy... Or nowadays the good woman kills the bad woman. But this is not a film about absolutes at all. Katherine is completely in the right and completely in the wrong at the same time.

FOOTNOTES

● Alan Rickman and Helen Mirren have never appeared together on screen, though he starred opposite her in a National Theatre production of *Antony And Cleopatra* in 1998 when he stepped in at the last moment for another actor.



As infamous gossip-monger Hedda Hopper in *Trumbo*.



Retired and extremely dangerous Victoria in 2010's *RED*.



Turning Prospero into Prospera in *The Tempest* (2010).

FOOTNOTES

❶ Hopper was the famously ruthless gossip columnist who could make or break careers in mid-century Hollywood. A fervent anti-Communist, she was also key to the persecutions that resulted in the Hollywood Blacklist.

❷ The sorcerer Prospero became Mirren's Prospera in Julie Taymor's 2010 adaptation of the Shakespeare play.

You were just talking about *Star Wars*, and that's a good example of those absolutes.

Yes, although at least in this last one you felt sympathy for the boy played by Adam Driver. He felt like a real psychological character rather than a cartoon.

You're also appearing as Hedda Hopper in *Trumbo* at the moment. She was much less morally torn. How much did you know about her?

At some point in the past I became fascinated by her. Hedda called her home "The House That Fear Built" ❶; she was an extraordinary character. It's interesting to read of powerful women in that era because they were pretty rare. What I didn't know was that *Trumbo* and a lot of those guys were sent to prison, and I didn't know the details of how they came back, which is the most interesting part of the story.

There's an echo between the characters of Hopper and Colonel Powell, in that they're both very sure of their own rightness.

That's true. Hedda had better costumes... or maybe *Eye In The Sky*'s camouflage is better in the sense that it would literally take me five minutes to get ready. No make-up, no hair: the longest thing was tying up the boots. As Hedda, it took half an hour just to do my eyebrows. And the wig and the hat and the dress and everything...

And, interestingly, Tilda Swinton is also playing Hedda — or at least, two versions of her — in *Hail, Caesar!*...
Yes, me and Tilda! I love it. I'm in very honoured company.

But do you ever feel a little territorial seeing someone else take on a role you've played?

Oh, no. With the classical roles, it's a bit like being the runner with the Olympic torch. You have your moment and then you pass it on, and the torch goes on and on. I mean, Hedda Hopper is not one of the classics, though she could be rather Shakespearean.

You once compared the blood and spectacle of Shakespeare to Tarantino. Are you a Tarantino fan?

I'm a huge fan. His films are poetic, almost; he uses words in an incredibly powerful way. I mean, I nearly fainted in *The Hateful Eight*, but I didn't want to leave! The violence just got to me; I'm quite susceptible to violence. I completely fainted in *Bonnie And Clyde* and had to be carried out. This time I felt myself going, so I left and was sort of hovering outside, looking in to see if it was safe to return. But Tarantino gives women wonderful roles. Isn't Jennifer Jason Leigh fantastic? The character is unremitting; no femininity, just spite! Actually I'd love to see Tarantino direct a Shakespeare play.

That would be interesting — though he might struggle to find great, bloody female roles there. Maybe he could change the gender; your Prospera in *The Tempest* actually reads better than most Prosperos. ❶

I have to say I agree. There's so little of the text you have to change — only a bit in the backstory and one scene in the beginning. I sometimes wonder if women had been allowed on stage in those days, if Shakespeare wouldn't >

THE EMPIRE INTERVIEW

have written it for a woman. With a man, Prospero's relationship with Miranda becomes bullying and patriarchal, and it's very different with a woman.

You've played a few roles that were originally male. That, and the John Gielgud role in the *Arthur* remake...

I think this role (*Powell*) was originally written for a man too. It's what I've been saying for 30 years. There's no problem with roles for women; just take a role for a man and give it a woman's name. Done! It was reading the script of Ridley Scott's *Alien* — which I had the privilege of doing, though unfortunately I didn't get a role in it — that made me realise it. All of the characters had names like "Ripley". There was no, "a lean, 32 year-old woman who doesn't realise how attractive she is" — there was absolutely none of that! You had no idea who was a man and who was a woman. That was a revelation.

Within a couple of years of reading *Alien* you were making *The Long Good Friday*, where you had to battle to make Victoria interesting — which she was, in the end.

Yes, in the end. Not quite as interesting as she *could* have been, but a lot more than she would have been if I hadn't been a pain in the arse. That role came to me, and I said, "I'd love to do it but I think the female character needs work and here are my ideas." Then I went on holiday and the script changed in other areas, but absolutely nothing had been done to her. Luckily, I was naive enough to think that you could just work it through — which we did. The great thing was Bob Hoskins who was wonderfully supportive. If he'd been against it, it would have been hopeless. We improvised, we wrote scenes and moved it around. And it was Bob's movie, so it was generous and really decent of him.

With a lot of your film roles during the '80s you've talked about pushing to make them more substantial. How much did you have to change a role like Georgina in *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife & Her Lover*?

Oh, I didn't have to push on that at all. In the way of Tarantino, the script was beautiful, it was verbal. Greenaway is a great artist, so I didn't want to mess with a word. I mean, Barry O'Keefe, who wrote *The Long Good Friday*, is a wonderful writer too. He'd just really short-changed the female character.

Tell us about *Excalibur*. You have John Boorman directing, all this operatic madness on screen, and many fantastic actors appearing in early film roles — how was that to make?

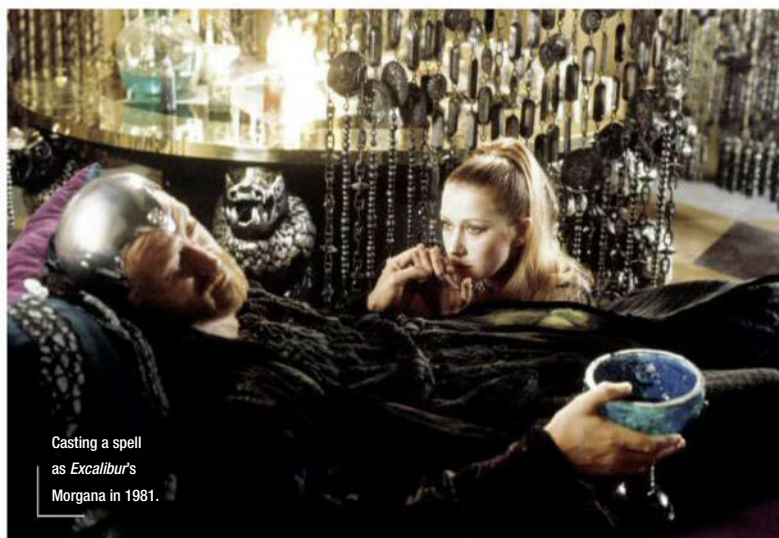
It was incredible, though we were all so ignorant. Poor John! Me, Liam (*Neeson*), Gabriel Byrne: none of us knew anything about filmmaking and he was very patient with us. And to be on a set and having knights in armour riding by was wonderful. The battle scenes were hilarious. John didn't have many extras, and they were all in armour so you couldn't see who was who. So he set the camera quite high, and anyone who died dropped out of shot. Then, all through the battle scenes he was screaming at them, "Run round!" So all these guys were wriggling along on their hands and knees, in full armour, then standing up out of shot, getting another sword and coming back in again.

Despite those films it took *Prime Suspect* to truly establish you. That seemed to be a part of the moment when the current TV golden age began.

There had been a really brilliant piece before *Prime Suspect* called *Edge Of Darkness* ❶, so I would give credit to that as



With Eddie Constantine and Bob Hoskins in 1980's *The Long Good Friday*.



Casting a spell as *Excalibur*'s Morgana in 1981.

FOOTNOTES

❶ A six-part thriller series for BBC2 in 1985, directed by Martin Campbell. He remade it as a Mel Gibson film in 2010.

❷ A 2001 adaptation of a Keith Laumer short story, featuring Christopher Lloyd, John Goodman, David Hyde Pierce and Mirren herself alongside Sydney Tamiia Poitier in the lead role.

well. But Jane Tennison was revolutionary. The prevailing attitude was that a woman couldn't lead a TV show. There had been *Juliet Bravo*, but that was more like a soap opera. They weren't at all sure it would work. So they said, "We'll do one series, and if it works we'll do two more."

And it turned out rather well.

It did, and that's really where I learnt how to act on film, how films are made. I wanted each writer and director to make it their own, so they'd feel passionate about it. I found myself hanging around the camera listening to how the shot was being set up and discussions about how it would cut.

Would you like to direct?

I did! I directed a half-hour film for Showtime television called *Happy Birthday* ❶. In fact, I was watching *Snowpiercer* the other day and I realised it had the same story as my little movie! My film was a satire set in an overcrowded, horrible city where one girl — I changed the character from a white male to a black female; that was my artistic requirement — fights her way to the top. I have to say that I was actually quite good at it and I really enjoyed it. But I'm a good actress, as opposed to an okay director. I didn't feel I needed to do it just to have the control,



Revolutionising TV detective drama with *Prime Suspect*, which enjoyed seven awards-hoarding seasons.

FOOTNOTES

① Mirren has been married for nearly 19 years to Taylor Hackford, director of *Ray*, *An Officer And A Gentleman* and *The Devil's Advocate*.

② A 2015 Radu Jude film, set in 1800s Romania and telling the story of a policeman's search for an escaped slave. It has not yet been released in the UK.

which I think a lot of actors do. But it did transform my understanding. Even living with my husband ① you don't really know what a director has to deal with until you've experienced it. It's given me immense patience with my directors, and now I'm *so* on their side.

What do you watch when you're not working?

I watch a lot of animation. There was a wonderful graphic film, *Waltz With Bashir*, that I thought was spectacular. I think with the coming of Pixar, animated films are so physically beautiful to watch, and very funny, very subtle.

Is that why you did *Monsters University*?

Yes, actually. And then I also watch foreign movies. Recently I saw a wonderful Hungarian film called *Aferim!* ②, which I loved.

What made you take on an action movie like *RED*?

I'd never done anything like that before, and I was terrified. Working with huge movie stars, they're a thing unto themselves. Bruce was unbelievably generous and sweet, but it was a form of film acting I felt very ignorant about. When it's taken three hours to set up a shot, to be completely on point is really difficult — and that's what these guys do, and they do it with ease. It was a hoot to make, but also challenging.

Was the experience similar on *National Treasure: Book Of Secrets*?

Yes, very much so. I was excluded from that sort of action for most of my life and I was so thrilled when finally I was asked to do something like that. Although the extraordinary thing about *National Treasure* and those enormous movies is that they have these big set-pieces but they don't have the script to go with them. The script is written to work with the set. So every morning we'd have these long discussions, and there were enormous, endless rewrites. It was fascinating. I mean, all films are different and I'm not devaluing one against the other, because honestly I love doing big action movies. That kind of movie is popcorn entertainment — fantastic, then we go home and don't think about it. *Eye In The Sky* is the exact opposite.

Apparently you were once named *Naturist Of The Year*. Is that true?

I was! Not that I've ever been to a naturist camp in my life, ever, incidentally. But I had said once that I enjoy being on nudist beaches if they happen to come my way, so to speak. There is something liberating and unsexual about being naked with other naked human beings. Naturists are relentlessly mocked, but I think they may have a point.

I can't imagine there are many Oscar-winners who have that particular double accolade.

Unfortunately I don't have an actual little figure of a naked person. Or actually I do — I have the SAG award, and that's a naked person.

Where do you keep your awards? In a trophy cabinet?

(*Deadpan*) I was thinking of building a wing. You know the way presidents have their libraries? A library with all my awards, and all my acceptance speeches running constantly, so when you walk in you hear me saying, "Thank you," in different ways... ■

EYE IN THE SKY IS OUT ON APRIL 8 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN THE NEXT ISSUE.

ABSOLUTE HERO

The director of *Absolute Beginners*, **Julien Temple**, on meeting, befriending and making movies with David Bowie.
“He was a great source of strength, if you’re a little out of the ordinary...”



I WAS STILL AT SCHOOL WHEN I SAW DAVID BOWIE LIVE FOR THE FIRST TIME, BACK IN 1971.

I would have been 16 or 17, and AWOL — my parents had no idea where I was. Me and some friends had bunked off school and run off to Glastonbury for the weekend. It was a very different kind of festival then, much smaller, perhaps 5,000 people at most. You didn't have to pay. Or at least, we didn't.

Bowie had been scheduled to come on earlier in the evening, but everything was so chaotic that he didn't appear. The whole thing had reached a climax with Traffic, and everyone had retired to their tents. I suppose because Bowie wasn't an important act, he was told he could go on at four in the morning when everyone was asleep. But people got so energised by what he was doing on stage that they started running around waking everyone else up, saying, "You've really got to come and see this guy!"

It became a very strange and powerful moment. Dawn was breaking and there was this wonderful celestial chorus of birds accompanying him on his guitar: a guy in a dress with very long hair who looked like a woman. It was very otherworldly and spectral.

EARLY ENCOUNTERS

It's a slightly prophetic coincidence that the next two times I saw David in the flesh after that Glastonbury performance, both were in cinemas of one sort or another.

After I had moved to London and begun my career as a director, I remember being at a screening of Fritz Lang's



Top: Julian Temple on set with blow-drying David Bowie.

Above: Bowie and Temple's first collaboration, *Jazzin' For Blue Jean*.

Metropolis at The Everyman Cinema in Hampstead. Just before the lights went down and the film began, Bowie and his entourage came in. That was a memorable thing, because they looked so fantastically exotic and alien. Just to have them there in this tiny cinema watching this film with you was a powerful little moment for me.

The next time I almost met him was after I had made *The Great Rock 'N' Roll Swindle* with The Sex Pistols. There was this rather pointless ritual of the 'public screening' you had to go through after you'd made a film in those days. You don't have to do it now, but you had to advertise a free screening of the film so anyone who wanted could attend and complain to the censor if they wanted to. You had to do it by law, but no-one ever actually turned up.

So we had ours in the Fox Theatre at Soho Square. As usual, it was empty. I remember during the film I was looking at the print or something and I realised

that one person had come in. This lone, shadowy figure was at the back of the screening room watching my film. The lights came up and I saw that it was David Bowie. He just zipped out after the film ended, but he was there watching it before anybody else had seen it.

There was this magpie-like quality to him. He liked to know what was going on before anyone else did. Which of course would become a defining aspect of him and his work.

THE FIRST MEETING

I was in Los Angeles when I got a call saying he wanted me to work on a video for him, which would become *Jazzin' For Blue Jean* (1984). I flew back to London straight away and we met. My memory of the location is fuzzy. It may well have been in an early manager's flat just off the Edgware Road. What



I remember very clearly was my surprise at how ordinary he was. I was expecting *The Man Who Fell To Earth*. I'd seen that film of course and I thought he was extraordinary in it, but I was rudely surprised when I finally met him in the flesh. I wasn't prepared for how unlike someone like Mick Jagger he was. I had worked with the Stones by then, and Mick is always 'on' as a star. But sometimes when you spoke to David you found yourself thinking, "My God, this can't be David Bowie!" Then you realised that he was able to summon up this strange star power that he had at will.

So the first meeting was quite a disorienting experience. But my initial response to this puzzlingly divided person is what that short film then became about. I had become very interested in presenting different versions of the people I was working with within the same film. I'd shot a *Come Dancing* video for The Kinks with Ray Davies playing a spiv from

Above: Bowie is *Man On Wire*. And *Man In Spivvy Suit*. **Above right:** The kids wig out as the *That's Motivation* number builds to a climax on — appositely — a giant record player.



the '40s who then turns up in the present and watches himself performing in the band. So I suggested doing something along those lines, where David would play a very ordinary version of himself and also an exotic, star version of himself. He became very excited by that idea and got completely involved in the whole thing. And he wanted to make not a video, but a 20-minute short film that would have the song as a centrepiece. He was convinced he could get MTV to play it rather than just a three-minute promo.

JAZZIN' FOR BLUE JEAN

The 'ordinary' version of the character David plays in *Jazzin' For Blue Jean* might be the nearest thing to the 'real' David Bowie that's been put on screen. I think it certainly has echoes of things that were happening in his life. Particularly his relationship with his older half-brother Terry, which was very important to him. Terry was schizophrenic and unwell while we were shooting. But when David was a teenager, Terry had fed him stuff like the Beat Poets and the whole jazz world of the West End, which David devoured. He was this exotic person who turned David on to a lot of things.

We had a great deal of fun on the shoot, but I remember the worst moment came as we shot the exterior scenes of the nightclub that 'ordinary' David is trying to get into, round the back of The Savoy. It was all, of course, supposed to happen at night. To my horror I realised that, at about half three in the morning, it was already starting to get light. We hadn't finished. It was like, "*Shit, what do we do?*" We'd

spent two or three days shooting the film and we weren't going to have an ending! But it turned out to be a brilliant moment, because David and I had to come up with something on the hoof. So at the end of the film, where David breaks the fourth wall by yelling at me, that came out of that screw-up. I think it still feels completely fresh today.

BOWIE ON CINEMA

With film, as with books and art, David was a voracious autodidact. We watched them together a lot. Buñuel was a big thing for him, as well as Fritz Lang, Cocteau and Fassbinder.

We watched the Ealing Studios films together, too. He loved comedy, and was a very good comic actor. I remember watching Tony Hancock's *The Rebel* with him, and him just laughing his head off all the way through. It may well have been his favourite film. I think he saw a connection with Hancock in that film, in a weird way. It's about that boring nine-to-five world that at one point David was destined to go into. Hancock plays a man trapped in a routine, enmeshed by Victorian repressed emotions, whose bad art is a means of escape. But somehow this much-hyped yet crap art becomes the most sought-after work in Paris. I think David felt that a little bit about himself, in a *Man Who Sold The World* kind of way. I was very aware, as I watched it with him, that he — probably more than anyone else — had broken down those repressive emotional hangovers that people had right after the War.

We shared a love of Hollywood musicals as well, which would fatefully lead us into *Absolute Beginners*. ➤

ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS

I was reading the novel while we were shooting *Jazzin' For Blue Jean*. I may have even given David a copy at that point. There's a phrase in the opening chapter where author Colin MacInnes describes a glorious summer night in '58 on Shaftesbury Avenue: "One day people will make musicals about this." If only we'd known when we'd started making it...

The role of Vendice Partners was perfect for David, and he came on board quite early. *Absolute Beginners* is very much influenced by Vance Packard (whose book, *The Hidden Persuaders, laid bare the dark arts of advertising in the late 1950s*) and David had worked at an advertising agency when he was younger. He knew that world and had found it very cynical and disliked it. Primarily, though, I think the film gave him an outlet for his love of Soho.

Soho was a mythic place for him. It was where the '60s had begun — but during the '50s. A mysterious, exotic land his brother fed him stories of when he was a kid. It was bright lights and bohemian, and where the action was. I used to go on tours of Soho's drinking dens with him, exploring the subterranean clubs and bars. I was astonished by how familiar he was with everybody, day and night. The afternoon clubs, and then the five-in-the-morning places like Gerry's. He knew the barmen and the hookers really well. He didn't drink very much but he smoked a lot, he liked that ambience.

And our Soho set was a miraculous thing. We had this idea of making a vast distillation of Soho, so all the good bits were right next to each other, but you still had the very strong sensation of actually being there. All the kids from the clubs in Soho were the extras. They would arrive direct from the real clubs and just be hanging out or mostly sleeping in the cages or basements of the set. When we started shooting, we had to go round waking them up. Even on days when he wasn't working, he would just come to the set and hang out with these kids — he was a kind of godlike figure to them. I think he loved that set. Before it got knocked down we were both trying to find ways of keeping it as some kind of nightclub somewhere.

David was very supportive of me after *Absolute Beginners* (which was mauled by the critics and underperformed at the box office). We were thrown off the film, so we didn't really get to finish it. He tried to get us back on it for some time, but that didn't work. I think he was aware after its release that it had really fucked my



career up. I couldn't work in England after that. I had to go to America and he was very supportive of me there, he continued to work with me. We did a couple of videos together, *Day-In Day-Out* and one for *Tin Machine*.

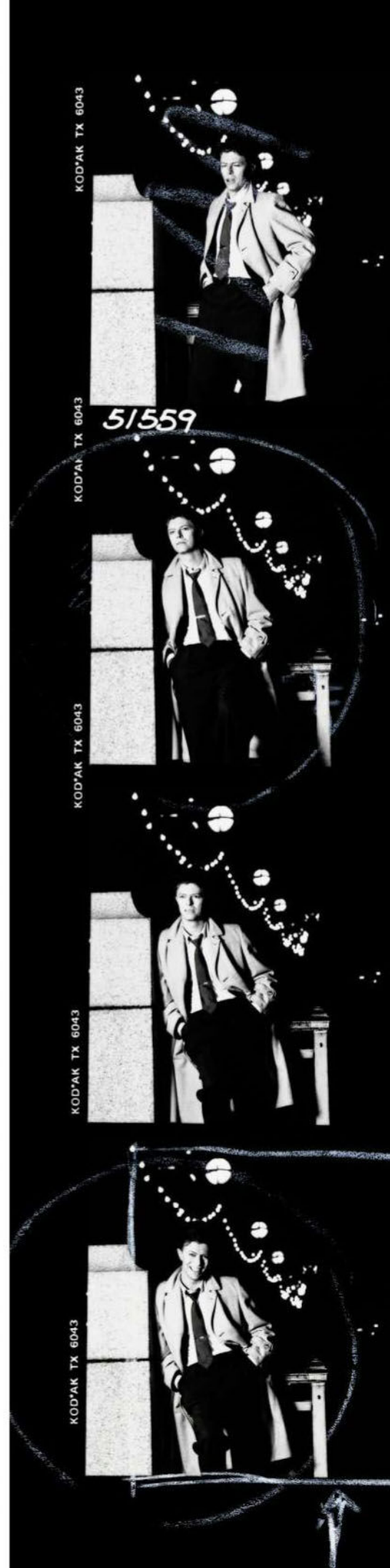
DIRECTING BOWIE

I've worked with a lot of musician-actors who've turned out to be a nightmare on set. Just getting any kind of cinematic performance out of them can become a battle of wills — the 'don't tell me what to do' syndrome. But David was always very flexible and collaborative. Perhaps it came from his confidence, because he was a very good actor — particularly of comedy, though he didn't often get to show that side of himself on screen. Once we'd decided on the idea, he became totally flexible and joyously collaborative. Then, like all the best actors, it was just a case of: how can we make it better? He

Top: With Patsy Kensit as Crepe Suzette.

Above: DB as ad exec Vendice Partners during *That's Motivation*. **Right:**

Bowie is beautiful 12 different ways on this contact sheet from an *Absolute Beginners* promo shoot.





was capable of doing whatever you asked, and very focused when he wanted to crack something. When his character had to fall through a ceiling in *Jazzin' For Blue Jean*, he was happy to do the stunt himself.

He was a bit fazed when I asked him to learn to tap-dance for *Absolute Beginners*. Then he went and mastered it in about a bloody week. The big dance number on the giant typewriter was incredibly difficult to shoot. And we had to fly him up onto this giant globe, so it wasn't easy to find a point where he could stand up, especially as he was whizzing up and down on a wire. It took a lot of physical effort to land properly and gracefully, but he was determined to do it.

He did want to direct films, and I'm sad that he didn't get to do that. He talked about making a film of Kerouac's *The Subterraneans*. And maybe *Last Exit To Brooklyn*, which of course was made in the end (by *Uli Edel*). I think he would have been a very good director — I would have loved to see anything he did. Of course, his son is now carrying that torch.

EPILOGUE

I got the news on a bloody text. It was waiting for me when I woke up on the Monday morning. I was very lucky to know David, more closely obviously when we worked together than later on.

I vividly remember going skiing with him. I'm not a skier and he was very considerate of this terrified guy going down a mountain with him. He said he thought of me as a younger brother at times. He was keen to turn me on to things, like his brother had for him.

I'm not saying that this was special — there were people much closer to him than I was — but it was great to feel that you were close to someone so extraordinary and inspirational. Once you've had a relationship with someone like that, it remains with you.

Underneath the sadness and the terrible shock there is something joyful. I think there's something positive in his death, which isn't something you can normally say about people passing away. He left an incredible kind of updraught behind him that energised people in ways I don't think they expected.

He was a great source of strength, if you're a little out of the ordinary, if you were a little frightened, if you didn't know who you were in life. He really connected and gave a lot of people a lot of strength.

Still, I find it very, very hard to think of him as history. He always seemed to be the future. ■

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REVIEW



FEBRUARY 25 – MARCH 30, 2016 | EDITED by NICK DE SEMLYEN



NEW RELEASE

SPECTRE

Decadence, dirty martinis, demented globe-trotting and — maybe — Daniel Craig's final outing as Bond. (p.124)

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Carol



FROM MARCH 21 / CERT. 15

DVD BR A

WOMEN IN LOVE



THE CHALLENGE for most movie romances is finding a reason to keep the two people on the poster apart for the majority of the running time,

thereby creating tension to carry the audience to the triumphant (or tragic) finale. In hackneyed melodramas and weak romcoms, this involves laboured set-ups, out-of-character tantrums and contrived obstacles. In *Carol*, as with director Todd Haynes' earlier *Far From Heaven*, there are compelling reasons of social prejudice to ensure that the two

female lovers keep their distance. Still, the need to be together is greater than any obstruction, and so *Carol* gets the sweep and power of the best love stories without any trace of artificiality.

But this is not primarily a tale of prejudice or fear. It's a beautifully understated study of two restrained, wary women who begin to embrace a wider way of life. Blanchett is the poised, apparently perfect Carol, in the process of divorcing her none-more-WASP husband Harge (Kyle Chandler). This Doris Day and Rock Hudson have a fraught relationship, with his fragile pride twisted by her burning need for freedom and her extraordinary strength of character.

At this most unstable time, Carol meets Audrey Hepburn-alike Therese (Rooney Mara), a tentatively hopeful shop girl who dreams of becoming a photographer. Their courtship is delicate, but driven; Therese can't articulate her fascination

Above: It had been a cracking *EastEnders*.

Below: "When you grow up, you can have a film named after you."

with this dazzling figure, but can't let it go either. Their intimacy unfolds as they spend a day together, then take a road trip across country. It's an achingly slow build, told in little moments. Therese helps a laughing Carol shed her fur coat as she drives; Carol gives Therese a makeover.

The behind-the-scenes featurettes and interviews on the disc may be patched together from on-stage Q&As, but they make it clear that this subtle, layered approach is very deliberate — as was every aspect of this carefully designed, gorgeously shot film. Its sheer period perfection could be distancing, were it not for Haynes' ability to echo the magic of *Brief Encounter*. There's a similar sort of tragedy of manners here, where everyone feels things deeply but no-one expresses themselves clearly. But these characters have too much passion to seem dusty or uninvolved. Love is barely mentioned in so many words, but it's there like lava, burning under every scene. **HELEN O'HARA**



ALSO OUT

**Suffragette**

★★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 12

DVD BR A

→ Propelled by righteous indignation and soaring to a heart-stopping climax, *Suffragette* tells a no-frills story of the fight for women's right to vote. Sticking it to the man in rousing if not quite spectacular style, Sarah Gavron's film features an outstanding Carey Mulligan as a laundress squeezed through the emotional wringer. **ES**

**Hotel Transylvania 2**

★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. U

DVD BR A A

→ Adam Sandler's vampiric hotelier tackles grandfatherhood in this hyperactively animated sequel aimed squarely at your little monsters. It's not high art, but the target audience will go bats for the Count's wacky attempts to turn his grandson to the Drac side. A threequel for this Adam's family would not be entirely unwelcome. **NA**

**The Intern**

★★

FROM FEBRUARY 29 / CERT. 12

DVD BR A A

→ The kindest thing to say about this comedy, in which septuagenarian Robert De Niro interns at Anne Hathaway's internet startup, is that it achieves its modest ambitions. Nancy Meyers' script avoids jokes about oldies vs. technology, focusing instead on the sweet central relationship, but the gags are weak and the characters uncomplicated. **NA**

**Brooklyn**

★★★★

FROM FEBRUARY 29 / CERT. 12

DVD BR A A

FAIRY TALE OF NEW YORK

SORT OF ANTI-*The Godfather*, *Brooklyn* sees a young immigrant arrive in America and, rather than form a deadly crime syndicate,

go on to be thoroughly pleasant to everybody she encounters. On paper, it sounds like a yawn: a drama populated by well-mannered people, with little in the way of incident. On screen, though, it's delightful, so much so that this \$10 million Little Film That Could has ended up a contender for the Best Picture Oscar.

Director John Crowley, who also shot the finale of *True Detective* Season 2, does nifty work with his limited budget: a sea storm is simulated with only close shots and a lurching camera. But most plaudits have to go to writer Nick Hornby, trimming Colm Tóibín's novel down with a sculptor's sensitivity, and star Saoirse Ronan, mesmerising as

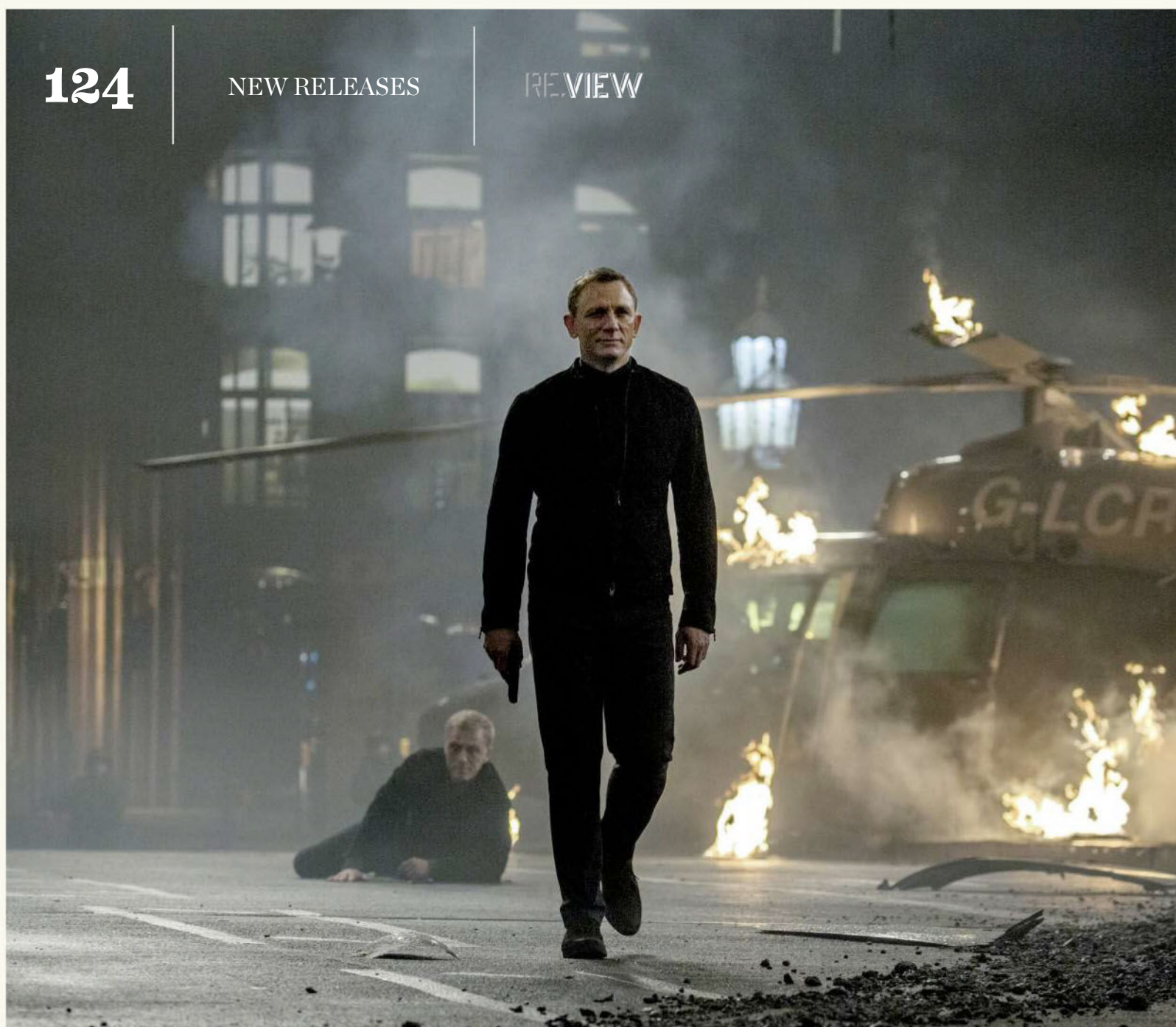


Top: Maybe the iris-recognition queue would have been the better bet. **Above:** Blackpool's first tower was quite radical.

good-hearted heroine Eilis Lacey.

It's a simple coming-of-age tale, set in a city that's coming of age itself. (In a lovely touch, New York blossoms into spring at the same time as Eilis starts to find her feet.) Her dilemma is a tough one, how to choose between two good men on different continents: goofy Italian émigré Tony (Emory Cohen) or wealthy Ennis-corny bachelor Jim (Domhnall Gleeson)? A million miles away from those crummy romcoms where Katherine Heigl has to learn to dump her dickhead boyfriend and get with the hunky hero, the story unfolds quietly, with elegance and empathy. As in life, sometimes, there are no easy answers: whatever she does, somebody gets hurt. Though at least here, no horse loses its head.

NICK DE SEMLYEN



Spectre

★★★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 12

DVD BR A

DON'T MENTION THE SONG



T VARIOUS POINTS during its 145 minutes, *Spectre* delivers a baddie's base in a hollowed-out crater, a watch that does a thing and a run-in with a comedy Italian. It hasn't gone full safari suit, but this is another small step towards the values of Bond BC (Before Craig). If it keeps going in this direction, three more films and James Corden will be mo-capping a double-taking pigeon.

Perhaps because *Skyfall* was so rooted in Britain, this time Sam Mendes happily displays a demented wanderlust. Kick-started by a revenge mission gifted 007 by Judi Dench's M, Bond hops from Mexico (the stunning Day Of The Dead opener gets a deep-dive examination in the special features) to Rome (a terrific

dead-of-night car chase) to Austria (a plane becomes a sledge) to Tangiers (a bruising fist-fight on a train). Scooping up Léa Seydoux's interesting but under-utilised scientist Madeleine Swann on the way, Bond discovers that the Quantum of previous Craig films was a small-fry outfit under the umbrella organisation of Spectre, fronted by Franz Oberhauser (a dialled-down Christoph Waltz with little screen time), who we suspect might be Blofeld because he has a thing for snow-white moggies and sports a collarless jacket. 007 stenographers will have a field day chalking up references and rarities: the Rolls Royce Phantom from *Goldfinger*, M (Ralph Fiennes) getting his hands dirty, Q (Ben Whishaw) in a foot chase, Moneypenny (Naomie Harris) in bed with another man.

Above: He was chuffed with another textbook landing.
Below: Collarless jacket! Run!





There's even a glimpse inside Bond's flat. Which is perhaps a good metaphor for the Craig era itself: dark and sparse, with few knick-knacks.

Spectre continues the series' somewhat dour obsession with Bond's backstory, grit (even the martini is dirty) and the slide towards something akin to reality. M16 is merging with MI5, digital surveillance is replacing the Double-O programme, Q has mortgage worries and Moneypenny seems a gnat's hair away from a call about PPI. Yet simultaneously Mendes builds on *Skyfall*'s mission to bring back Guy Hamilton-era panache. In a series not renowned for its visual style, Hoyte van Hoytema's luxurious cinematography takes things to a new level — watch Monica Bellucci's widow stroll through a palatial mansion —

Top: Léa Seydoux holds her own.

Above: He was sure he'd seen Hinx on WWE SmackDown.

and the whole film is suffused with a decaying decadence that mirrors Bond's increasing obsolescence in the age of drones.

The director is also adept at bringing the lightness out in Craig. Watch him deliver deadpan quips to a mouse à la *Diamonds Are Forever*, or effortlessly transition from parachuting to walking. Off the back of such swagger, Craig won the coveted role of Stormtrooper Mugged Off By Rey in *The Force Awakens*. Whether he'll return to Bond is not yet clear. As the movie ends, the character is presented with a dilemma: a normal life or the spy life? Madeleine Swann may be an enticing proposition, but ultimately the question is surely moot. Who, come 2018, is going to pay money to see *Ikea Is Not Enough*? **IAN FREER**

ALSO OUT

**Bad Bromance**

★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 15

DVD BR A

→ Jack Black is an average Joe who goes to extremes to bring the most popular guy in class (James Marsden), now a minor actor in LA, back for his high-school reunion. The premise and characters are familiar, but Jarrad Paul's black comedy has some real surprises in store, and Black and Marsden form an unlikely but fun odd couple. **HOH**

**Kill Your Friends**

★★

FROM FEBRUARY 29 / CERT. 18

DVD BR A

→ Record exec Steven Stelfox (Nicholas Hoult) is charmless and out of control. Sadly, so is this adaptation of John Niven's book, a mess of would-be *American Psycho* shock crime and fuzzy '90s music-industry satire. Hoult does his best to lose his nice-guy persona, but the film leaves him hanging and never quite settles on a tone. **HOH**

**The Lady In The Van**

★★★★

FROM MARCH 7 / CERT. 12

DVD BR A

→ Quietly affecting and spikily funny, the true story of the van-dwelling squatter parked in Alan Bennett's Camden driveway is a playful yet barbed odd-couple drama. Maggie Smith and Alex Jennings make a sparky pair, while Bennett's script, adapted from his West End play, pokes unsparring fun at middle-class hypocrisy. **PDS**



MR. ROBOT: SEASON 1

★★★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 18

DVD BR A

BYTE CLUB



WHEN CABLE channel USA Network announced *Mr. Robot* last year, the response was weary indifference. After all, hackers ranting anti-capitalist screeds were *so* 2014, while its star was a character actor best known for playing the pharaoh in *Night At The Museum*. Now, buoyed by critical acclaim and with a pair of Golden Globes bouncing around in its backpack, Sam Esmail's jittery tech thriller is getting the attention it deserves.

What Michael Mann failed to do with \$100 million and a box of jazzy CGI, Esmail and director Niels Arden Oplev (2009's *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*) manage in a single, hour-long pilot: they make using computers look fun. We don't need byte's-eye views of data

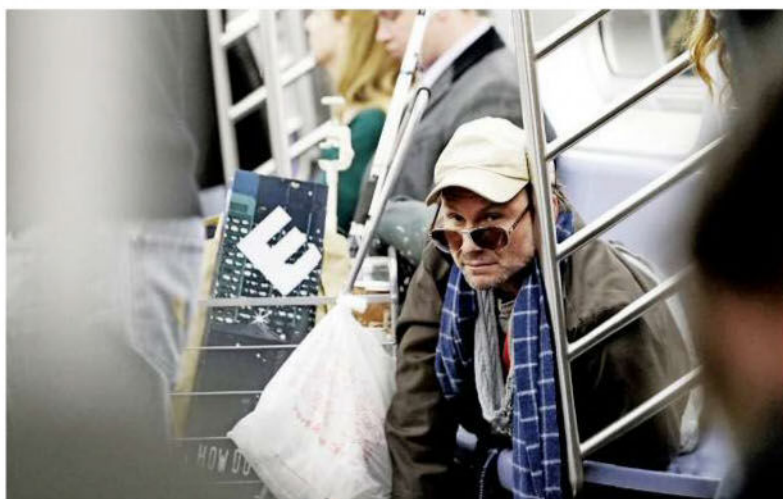
skittering down glowing pathways — just a relatable, believable character exploiting human fallibility to unearth close-kept secrets: be they corporate misconduct or a therapist's predilection for anal porn.

That the first episode plays like a movie is no accident. Originally conceived as a feature, this first season marks what would have been the first act of Esmail's film — subsequently re-worked and pitched for television after growing beyond its original scope. Esmail's influences (among them *Taxi Driver*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Fight Club* and *The Matrix*) are worn proud and loud, and *Mr. Robot* makes no apology for its cinematic aspirations.

The character at the heart of the show is Elliot, a nervy recluse with the social skills of a lunchbox, cursed with a menu of unspecified personality



Clockwise from above: Rami Malek as cybersecurity engineer-turned-hacker Elliot; Mr. Robot himself, Christian Slater; fsociety hacktivist Darlene (Carly Chaikin).



disorders that render him incapable of normal human interaction. Instead, he moves through the world alone, aided by a carefully administered morphine regimen and connecting with people by violating their personal data. It's a harmless, if creepy, existence until he becomes entangled with masked hacktivist group 'fsociety', fronted by a flamboyantly nutso Christian Slater as the title character. Along with Mr. Robot and his rag-tag band of nerd vigilantes, Elliot executes an elaborate plan to take down über-conglomerate E Corp (or 'Evil Corp' as Elliot dubs them), erasing all the world's debt into the bargain.

Elliot's misalignment with social norms, illegal second life (his day job is cyber-security for Evil Corp themselves) and persistent narration brings to mind *Dexter*, except with server racks instead of kill rooms. He's an awkward, fragile and deeply vulnerable protagonist, played to perfection by the show's secret weapon: saucer-eyed star Rami Malek. Shouldering most of the dramatic load, Malek's function as the show's narrator and principle point of view places him at the heart of almost every scene, each of which he quietly steals, even from Slater's maniacal grandstanding.

When Elliot does take a back seat, the secondary plotlines are picked up by

his childhood (and only) friend, Angela (Portia Doubleday), and Evil Corp's VP Of Technology, Tyrell Wellick (Martin Wallström). The latter in particular lends the show a sinister tone. Tyrell (a nod to *Blade Runner's* corporate overlord) is a darkly predatory character, neither ally nor true antagonist, with a penchant for violent tantrums and BDSM with his heavily pregnant wife. The secondary threads twine around the central story before (deliberately) undermining it completely, when it becomes apparent to the viewer just how unreliable our deranged narrator really is.

It's here where *Mr. Robot* truly shines. That there's a third-act rug-pull may seem like a spoiler, but Esmail's prestige is heavily signposted from episode one. Elliot's inner voice manifests within the show's reality (his nickname 'Evil Corp' is adopted even by its CEO), resulting in a delirious, dream-like quality and clear indication that everything is not what it seems.

A zeitgeisty exploration of cyber-terrorism in the modern age, shot through a nihilistic lens, this is among 2015's best shows. The finale is a curveball — neither what you expect, nor necessarily what you want — but it marks the end of a sharply written, refreshingly original ride. **JAMES DYER**

ALSO OUT



Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt: Season 1

★★★

FROM MARCH 7 / CERT. TBC

DVD

→ *30 Rock* meets *Room*, Tina Fey's odd but often inspired comedy follows a woman after she escapes captivity. Its courtroom-based final stretch works less well, but star Ellie Kemper shines, while Martin Short is wondrously deranged as plastic-faced plastic surgeon Dr. Grant, pronounced 'Franff'. **NDS**



The Last Panthers: Season 1

★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 15

DVD BR A

→ Sky's prestige drama boasts a marvellous cast and authentically grubby criminal-underworld look, but could do with a bit more plot. It shows the fall-out after a diamond heist, but ambition overwhelms it, with the myriad characters and locations making the pace frustratingly slow. **OR**



Bloodline: Season 1

★★★★

FROM MARCH 21 / CERT. TBC

DVD

→ This classy Netflix 13-parter from the team behind *Damages* is riveting. It plays out dark secrets in the Florida sunshine as the seemingly perfect Rayburn family start to crack when black-sheep brother Danny (Ben Mendelsohn, terrific) returns. It sounds soapy, but great performances and smart writing keep you gripped. **IF**



Steve Jobs



FROM MARCH 7 / CERT. 15

DVD BR A

APPLE LORE

DAVID FINCHER jumped ship; it looked worryingly similar to a certain Ashton Kutcher film; Michael Fassbender didn't much resemble the man he was playing. Yet anyone who skipped Danny Boyle's examination of Apple's great visionary because of those early fears missed a kinetic, operatic tale about an iconoclast who, for all his flaws, really did put "a dent in the universe".

Covering just 14 years in three acts, *Steve Jobs* isn't a conventional biopic. Yet Boyle brings Sorkin's script to life with great imagination, while there are outstanding performances from Fassbender, Kate Winslet and Seth Rogen. Fassbender, in particular, is commanding at all times, whether pacing around a stage, fretting about his next big product launch, or dealing with more intimate dramas in a greenroom. Whether you're a tech junkie or not, the drama here is fantastically entertaining, both a paean to a genius and a castigation of what one of Jobs' long-suffering colleagues called an "assaholic".

"Historians tell you what happened, dramatists tell you what it felt like," says Boyle in the extras. "The only thing that really happened is they couldn't get the computer to say, 'Hello,'" Sorkin admits in his commentary with editor Elliot Graham, which is less captivating than the one in which Boyle flies solo. All three, plus the cast, are on hand for 45-minute 'making of' *Inside Jobs*, and while deleted scenes mentioned by Boyle are missing, the background detail here is plentiful. **DAVID HUGHES**

EMPIRE VIEWING GUIDE

EMPIRE
SPOILER
ALERT!

WORDS IAN NATHAN

DIRECTOR DANNY BOYLE SHARES THE SECRETS OF HIS IFILM



King Arthur

The movie begins with Arthur C. Clarke championing the potential of a fridge-freezer-sized computer. The archival footage is to remind digital natives that machines weren't always pocket-sized. "It had a secondary impact," says Danny Boyle. "It told you that Steve was not the sole guy responsible for imagining the future." Later in the film, there's a poster of Alan Turing, which a journalist fails to recognise: "'Cause he doesn't look like Benedict Cumberbatch."

04.31

All About Steve

"We decided we would chase an actor rather than have a lookalike," says Boyle. Michael Fassbender may not look like Jobs, but he ended up *being* him. "Michael is a purist, he is extraordinarily uncompromising about going for the truth of it. What the essence of it is; not what the dressing of it is... You want people thinking, 'Why is he behaving like this? What is it with his daughter?'"



22.05

The Clamour Of Kate

Alongside daughter Lisa, Joanna Hoffman was the key character for Boyle: "This guy is a monster made beautiful by these two women." Hoffman is Jobs' conscience, his right arm, and his "work wife", guilty of allowing him to behave so poorly, and Kate Winslet was on a mission, sending Boyle a photograph of herself in an unstylish wig. "When [an actor's] got that fever, don't get in their way — just clear a path for it," says the director. "I realised what it was: as an actress and an artist, she is making a transition into middle age. That role let her grow."



26.25

Woz Not Woz

Preparing to play Apple co-founder Steve 'Woz' Wozniak, Seth Rogen bonded with the real deal. Two nice guys who feel underappreciated, guesses Boyle. "Seth, who is the loveliest man in the world, maybe feels comedians aren't given the credit." And Woz could never escape the pull of his former partner. "However much [Jobs' colleagues] moved on, nobody is interested. All they want to know about is when they orbited Steve Jobs' planet. And they are still in orbit."

32.43

Great Scott

While he's not name-checked, the 1984-themed ad to promote the Macintosh that Jobs and John Sculley (Jeff Daniels) squabble over was the work of Ridley Scott. "I rang Ridley [to let him know]," says Boyle. "Not to ask his permission — we didn't ask anyone for their permission, because they wouldn't have given it. Even [Apple] were quite contrary. But Ridley was great. He was delighted it was in there. Funnily enough, when they first aired it, the Orwell estate told them not to screen it again because it infringed copyright."



36:50

Stock Takes

Flipping film stock between the eras — 16mm for 1984, 35mm for 1988, digital for 1998 — was cinematographer Alwin H. Küchler's brainwave. "As soon as you said it, it was like, *yeah*," relishes Boyle. "In 1998, we hadn't started using digital yet. But Jobs had, because they released *Toy Story* [in the mid-'90s]. 16mm felt like a good way to show the early days where they thought of themselves as pirates, working out of a garage. The actors loved it. It makes everyone look younger. And 35mm felt like a good one for the middle act, for the storytelling."



00:38:44

None More Black

To find obsolete Apple products — Macintoshes, handheld Newtons, a pristine iMac, but strictly no Apple IIs — Boyle mounted a team who trawled eBay and sites trading in tech relics. Hardest was locating a shop-quality NeXT 'black box' Computer. "Most of the ones we got had scratches. It may have looked beautiful, but I don't think it was very practical."

49:59

Flush With Success

Possibly the weirdest Jobsian quirk we witness in the film is his habit of washing his feet in a toilet bowl before a talk. "He used to do that. People spoke about it," maintains Boyle. "It must have been a nervous tic, if that is the right term for him. We put it in to amuse ourselves, and those who knew [about it], knowing other people would be baffled. Which is fine: he was *not* predictable."



01:08:37

Apocalypse Row

The flashback to the night the board gather to decide Jobs' fate needed something extreme. As Boyle points out, all the memories within the film are subjective, and inevitably Jobs would amplify the details of "the worst night of his life" into a Biblical downpour. "It might have been a shower of rain, which is unusual for California, but Steve would have remembered it as apocalyptic. It was the night that he lost the company."



01:14:47

Hard Boiled

"Aaron (Sorkin) barely writes any stage directions," says Boyle. "He's happy for you to try anything." With the repeated cycle of the same six characters 40 minutes before a launch, Boyle knew he needed to fizz up the visuals. Hence the super-imposed Dylan lyrics, and the jazzy time-capsule montages. "We wanted to have these refreshers in-between where you catch up," he explains. "It allows you to get stuff in that you wouldn't normally get in there, and strike a blow for The Libertines and The Maccabees."

01:37:00

Take My Breath Away

For the lengthy speeches, especially Fassbender's hyper-rhetorical mode as Jobs, Boyle edited out the actors pausing for breath. "We shot with these long, long takes, which allowed actors to get into this propulsive rhythm. Editing, you can see them refreshing the tank, you start to identify it." So he removed them; these tiny refractions of time. "We literally jumped reality. It gives a kind of breathless quality to it, where you are listening, almost not breathing yourself." He still has the audio file containing all the stolen breaths.



Kim Newman's MOVIE DUNGEON

OLD-SCHOOL THRILLS AND BLOOD-STAINED SPILLS

ILLUSTRATION JOHN ROYLE

LASSIC MONSTERS make a comeback in Damien Leone's well-meaning if overlong *Frankenstein Vs. The Mummy*. On a present-day American campus,

Frankenstein (bland Max Rhyser) places the brain of a vile bodysnatcher into his monster (Constantin Tripes), while an Egyptology prof (Boomer Tibbs) vivifies an evil mummy (Brandon deSpain) by sacrificing coeds. Tripes' articulate creature is unusually malicious, but (as ever) the mummy comes in a dusty second.

David Gelb's *The Lazarus Effect* is a subtler Frankenstein-on-campus tale which harks back to classic mad science but has a plethora of up-to-date concerns. Significantly named scientist Frank (Mark Duplass) devises a defibrillator-equivalent to overcome brain death. When partner Zoe (Olivia Wilde) — Greek for "life" — is electrocuted, Frank brings her back as an otherworldly, altered being with *Lucy*-like enhanced brain activity, *Carrie*-like psychic powers and black

contact lenses. Well-cast and acted, despite hokey shocks it's a lot of fun.

As the universe dictates, if someone makes a Frankenstein picture, someone else will make a Dracula movie. Derek Hockenbrough's *Dracula: The Impaler* sees seven obnoxious students (a greedy one, a lustful one... see where this is going?) visit Dracula's shack in Romania. Vlad's spirit has possessed a descendant and the sinners get ironically killed, but a better bet is Emily Hagins' *My Sucky Teen Romance* (aka *My Teenage Vampire Romance*), a fresh comedy-horror with a sweet, thoughtful streak. At a comic convention haunted by bloodsuckers, fangirl Elaine Hurt has an odd relationship with just-back-from-the-dead vampire Patrick Delgado. Hagins, 18 at the time of production, has a genuine, distinctive talent; she's a name to watch out for.

It's been a decade since Graboids last grabbed and Ass Blasters last ass-blasted, so *Tremors 5: Bloodlines* is a welcome revival. Shot in South Africa, it teams series star Michael Gross with *Scream*'s Jamie Kennedy on a safari to investigate underground monster activity on a game reserve. The formula of squabbling comedy dialogue and imaginative monster action still works, and it has great CG creatures for its budget level.

Ben Cresciman's languid *Sun Chohe* follows possibly unstable Janie (Sarah Hagan), who is ignored by her jet-setting father and lives in a luxurious LA mansion with a carer (Barbara Crampton) who is wary of letting her go out too much. When Janie becomes obsessed with a chance acquaintance (Sara Malakul Lane), she goes wildly off the rails and, in the last act, changes her role from captive to captor. Not an easy watch, it's powerful and disturbing stuff.

"LET'S JUST SURVIVE THIS AFRICAN WORM INVASION AND GO BACK TO NEVER SPEAKING TO EACH OTHER AGAIN."
TREMORS 5: BLOODLINES



PICKS OF THE MONTH

Nina Forever



→ The Blaine brothers' *Nina Forever* is an unusual, striking Brit-horror gem. Paramedic Holly (Abigail Hardingham) is drawn to Rob (Cian Barry), partly because she's intrigued by his tragic background — which includes a dead ex and a suicide bid. Whenever they have sex, the dead Nina (Fiona O'Shaughnessy) manifests, naked and bleeding. What's really creepy (and interesting) is that Holly gradually becomes fixated on the ghost. Acute about lingering grief and polite British misery, this is sexy, scary and blackly comic.

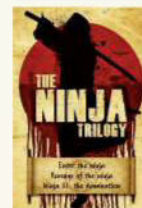
Aquarius



→ Season 1 of this gritty, trippy crime drama follows tough cop Sam Hodiak (David Duchovny) and his groovier partners as they crack cases in 1967

Los Angeles. Searching for the missing daughter of a politically connected lawyer, Hodiak comes across hustler/pimp/wannabe pop star Charles Manson (Gethin Anthony) and his harem. Heavy on foreshadowing, this has a James Ellroy vibe as brutal police tactics weave in and out of the issues of the hippie era, while Anthony is mesmerizing as monster-in-the-making Manson.

The Ninja Trilogy



→ Cannon's 1980s *Ninja* series is a rare trilogy that improves with each instalment. Enter *The Ninja* is clumsy tosh with a few good stunts and weird casting (Franco

Nero as a ninja?). *Revenge Of The Ninja* is outrageous tosh with a lot of great stunts, courtesy of series holdover choreographer/star Shô Kosugi. *Ninja III: The Domination* is an exploitation action-horror-disco masterpiece, with katana-swinging Lucinda Dickey (the *Electric Boogaloo* girl!) in leg-warmers as a dancercise instructress possessed by a cop-killing ninja.

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THE CRIB SHEET

BATMAN

GEAR UP FOR *BATMAN V SUPERMAN* WITH THIS GUIDE TO THE DARK KNIGHT'S MOVIE OUTINGS WORDS CHRIS HEWITT



FILM GUIDE

BATPLOT

BATGADGETS

BATVEHICLES

BATZINGER



**BATMAN:
THE MOVIE**
(1966)

A gang of Gotham's crooks (The Riddler, The Penguin, Catwoman, The Joker) want to turn diplomats into dust. Only Batman (Adam West) can stop them!

The Shark-Repellent Batspray, perfect for repelling rubber sharks.

Batcopter. Batboat. And, of course, the classic Batmobile. Could Batman be Jeremy Clarkson?

"It was noble of that animal to hurl himself into the path of that final torpedo."



BATMAN
(1989)

The Joker intends to gas the population of Gotham. Only Batman (Michael Keaton) can stop him!

Batarang, Bat-hook and more. "Where does he get those wonderful toys?" asks The Joker. Bat-Argos?

The Anton Furst-designed Batmobile, like an F1 car that's into The Cure. Plus the Batwing.

"I'm Batman."



**BATMAN
RETURNS**
(1992)

The Penguin and Catwoman join forces, and attempt to blow up Gotham with rocket-armed penguins. Only Batman (Keaton) can stop them!

A handy remote-controlled Batarang.

The Batmobile, which later sheds its 'wings' to become the Batmissile.

"Eat floor... high fibre." He's not exactly a grade-A stand-up, Batman.



**BATMAN
FOREVER**
(1995)

The Riddler and Two-Face team up to build a device that steals people's brainwaves. Only Batman (Val Kilmer) and new sidekick Robin can stop them!

Holy sonic Batarang, Batman!

New, improved Batmobile. A short-lived Batwing Mk. II that becomes a Batsub.

"It's the car, right? Chicks love the car."



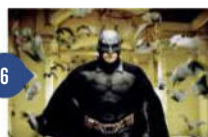
**BATMAN
& ROBIN**
(1997)

Mr. Freeze and Poison Ivy team up to freeze all of mankind with a giant ray. Only Batman (George Clooney), Robin and new comrade Batgirl can stop them!

The Bat-Credit Card. Possibly the worst idea in the history of movies.

Bats has gone nuts in the sales: Batmobile, Bathammer, Batskiff, Batcycle for Batgirl. Bat-Credit Card ahoy!

"This is why Superman works alone."



**BATMAN
BEGINS**
(2005)

Ra's Al Ghul and The Scarecrow team up to expose the citizens of Gotham to a fear-inducing drug and destroy the city. Only Batman (Christian Bale) can stop them!

Smaller, sleeker Batarangs. A sonic emitter that can attract bats, like a sort of Bat-Tinder.

A big, bulky Batmobile that goes by the name the Tumbler.

"Well, a guy who dresses up like a bat clearly has issues."



**THE DARK
KNIGHT**
(2008)

The Joker unleashes havoc on Gotham, turning do-gooder DA Harvey Dent into maniac Two-Face in the process. Only Batman (Bale) can stop them!

A new cape that allows Wayne to glide through the Hong Kong skies. Plus a Bat-grappling gun.

The Tumbler makes another appearance. When it's damaged, it becomes mega-bike the Batpod.

"WHERE IS HE?!?" Christian Bale tries out his Bat-bellow for the first time.



**THE DARK
KNIGHT
RISES**
(2012)

Bane and Talia Al Ghul team up to destroy Gotham with a nuclear bomb. Only Batman (Bale), with new frenemy Catwoman, can stop them!

Batarangs, used to take out bad guys silently.

The Batmobile/Tumbler again. Catwoman uses the Batpod. And there's the debut of flying machine the Bat.

"I came back to stop you." This is the best Batman quote from this film.



Paper Planes

★★

FROM NOW / CERT. U

DVD BR A

→ In rural Australia, a precocious tyke competes in the national paper-plane-throwing competition, with help from his dysfunctional family. Played broad and breezy, there's little attempt to cater to over-tens, and while it's hard to begrudge the twinkly-eyed young cast — many of whom outshine the grown-ups — this sort of thing has been done better before. **JNU**



Infinitely Polar Bear

★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 15

DVD BR A

→ This semi-autobiographical tale of two children being raised by their manic-depressive father in always-sunny 1970s Boston tackles mental health with the lightest of touches. So twee and cheerful that you long for some conflict, but Mark Ruffalo — a tightly wound coil of puppyish energy and terrifying irresponsibility — gives an enthralling performance. **JNU**



The Last Witch Hunter

★

FROM NOW / CERT. 15

DVD BR A

→ Within the first seconds of the 'making of' featurette, Vin Diesel utters the words, "Dungeons & Dragons." While his love of the fantasy game is endearing, it's not inspired a smart choice with this, in which he plays an immortal hag-twatter boring the streets of modern-day New York. It's like someone mated *The Mortal Instruments* with the Nic Cage *Wicker Man*. **DJ**



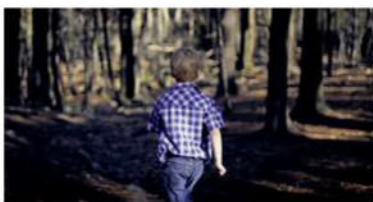
Dark Places

★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 15

DVD BR A

→ Greenlit off the back of *Gone Girl* buzz, this adaptation of another Gillian Flynn novel is in dire need of a David Fincher. Charlize Theron trudges through a dreary murder-mystery, involving Satan-worship, a massacre and many scenes in laundrettes, while lines like, "I have a meanness inside me, real as an organ," will make you want to fake your own death. **NDS**



The Fear Of 13

★★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 15

DVD BR A

→ This riveting, intimate doc introduces us to Death Row inmate Nick Yarris as he recounts the escapades, ordeals and rare glimmers of hope that have marked his life. The sole interviewee in David Singleton's uniquely focused film, he's an engaging storyteller who has you hanging on his every word right up until the emotional knock-out of an ending. **ES**



Criminal Activities

★★

FROM MARCH 7 / CERT. 15

DVD

→ If you threw every Tarantino script page into the air, then picked up 90 at random, you might end up with this. John Travolta is a quirky crime lord, based at (LOL!) the Royale Hotel. A gang of crooks hole up in a building. Everyone waves guns around, and talks and talks and talks. But Jackie Earl Haley's bland film is more limp patty than Big Kahuna Burger. **NDS**



Sleeping With Other People

★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 15

DVD BR A

→ Director Leslye Headland's pitch for this was a beaut: "When Harry Met Sally for assholes." You'd have to be an asshole *not* to enjoy this team-up of charming stars Alison Brie and Jason Sudeikis. There are laugh-free patches, but it's worth watching for the funny bits, not least a novel use of the word "mousetrap". **NDS**



Camp X-Ray

★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 15

DVD BR A

→ Kristen Stewart channels Clarice Starling as an army private assigned to Guantanamo Bay, where she strikes up a fractious friendship with an Arab detainee (*A Separation*'s Peyman Moaadi). Perhaps director Peter Satter's intention was to humanise those on both sides of the cell door, but despite two strong performances, the narrative never comes to life. **DH**



Mississippi Grind

★★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 15

DVD A

→ A gambling addict (Ben Mendelsohn) heads down-river with a new acquaintance (Ryan Reynolds) towards, your every instinct screams, disaster. But Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck's film keeps you guessing: is his buddy a con man, or is the real danger his own worst instincts? Smart and nuanced, it will make you sweat the turn of a card. **HOH**



ADVENTURES IN STREAMING

EACH ISSUE, OUR INTREPID WRITER FOLLOWS NETFLIX'S COMPUTER-CALIBRATED RECOMMENDATIONS, GOING WHEREVER THE TRAIL LEADS

WORDS SIMON CROOK

Bruce Willis



HIS MONTH, ON MARCH 19, a certain action veteran turns 61. Three cheers for Bruce Willis: "Yip! Yip!" "Ki-yay!" Actually, this birthday Bruce-a-thon is 100 per cent *Die Hard*-free:

there aren't any on Netflix. What *is* on offer is a mixed grill of classics, clunkers and curios. Any career spanning 70 films in 30 years is bound to have its quality wobbles, but draw a graph of Willis' filmography and it looks like a saw or a mountain-range: a long, jagged wave of ups and downs. Bruce is unbreakable but he's also unguessable. This is the man who followed up *Die Hard 2* with *Look Who's Talking Too*. Expect a bumpy ride.

What with all those knockdowns and comebacks, Willis' career resembles that of a hardened prize-fighter. First up: ***Pulp Fiction***, in which he plays, er, a hardened prize-fighter. Travolta's Vincent owns the film's iconography, but Bruce's section, *The Gold Watch*, is the standout story. Tarantino has a peculiar knack for identifying an actor's essence. In Willis, he saw the reincarnation of Aldo Ray, which is spot-on: Bruce is the closest modern Hollywood has to a '50s tough guy. In *The Gold Watch*, Butch is like a piece of lard-lined Andrex — he doesn't take shit from anyone. Or any gimp. Anybody else still wish he went for the chainsaw over the samurai sword?

From career high to howling low. Buried on DVD last year, ***Vice*** casts Bruce as all-seeing overlord of a hedonistic android resort. Think Club 18-30 meets *Westworld* with the fun-chip removed. When Ambyr Childers' rogue-bot becomes self-aware and makes her escape, the film sinks into grumpy action bilge shot in a depressing, anti-bacterial blue. If it can solve a scene with a gratuitous, deadening shoot-out, it will. Over and over again. Squinting at his lines in a glassy iHQ, Willis barely moves a muscle. All the action's left to Thomas Jane's grizzled cop. In fact, Willis is so blank-eyed you could well be watching a Brucedroid. Maybe you are. Maybe the real Bruce was sitting at home, slippers on, planning his own *Die Hard* theme-park called Vestworld.

We're back up. In ***Bandits***, Willis joins Billy Bob Thornton as a modern-day Butch and Sundance, merrily robbing banks until they both



fall in love with Cate Blanchett's hostage. Cue wonky love triangle. Is it a thriller? A rom-com? A rob-com? I dunno. Neither does Barry Levinson — his direction's all over the place, but his meandering style has a purpose. *Bandits'* baggy charm lies in its character-driven comedy, and the interplay between a neurotic Thornton and Willis, gamely sending up his hardman image (Thornton even calls him "Mr. Action Figure Hero Guy"). Worth revisiting for Willis pulling a heist with a marker pen and showcasing an astonishing menagerie of dodgy hair-piece disguises. Bruce loves renovating his head with a wig. There's enough here to open up a zoo.

Now down again. Or is it an up? I'll probably get black-listed for this, but I saw ***Hudson Hawk*** on its opening weekend and still endure the shame of having had a really good time. Call it wrong-stalgia, but my opinion hasn't changed: it's still the drunkest blockbuster of the '90s. Showtune heists, butler assassins, agents named after chocolate bars... They really did make it up as they went along. No wonder Willis' side-smirk lasts the full 97: it's like a colossally expensive private joke. Embrace its dollar-burning daftness, cartoony action and rowdy hamming, and you've got the best spy-spoof cat-burglar *Da Vinci Code* musical ever made. Probably.

Finally, ***The Siege*** — another flop worth reappraising. Released in 1998, Edward Zwick's urgent thriller was originally dismissed as fantasy. Now it looks queasily prescient. If New York were attacked by Islamist suicide bombers, how would America respond? Denzel Washington's the terrorist-hunting agent; Willis, the neo-fascist general inciting race-hate and martial law. From *In Country* to *Hart's War*, Bruce's CV is decorated with army heroes (Willis Sr. was a soldier) but he's the enemy within here — less a character, more a cold symbol of hostile, hawkish patriotism, like a militarised Donald Trump without the electrocuted seagull hair.

The politics are clumsy but here's a rare, bold studio movie that dares to ask some ruthless, frightening questions. Would Hollywood make *The Siege* now? Would Bruce? You've got more chance of seeing *Hudson Hawk 2*. Or, come to think of it, *Vestworld*.

NEW TO STREAMING

Love:
Season 1

★★★★

OUT NOW

M

ADULT EDUCATION

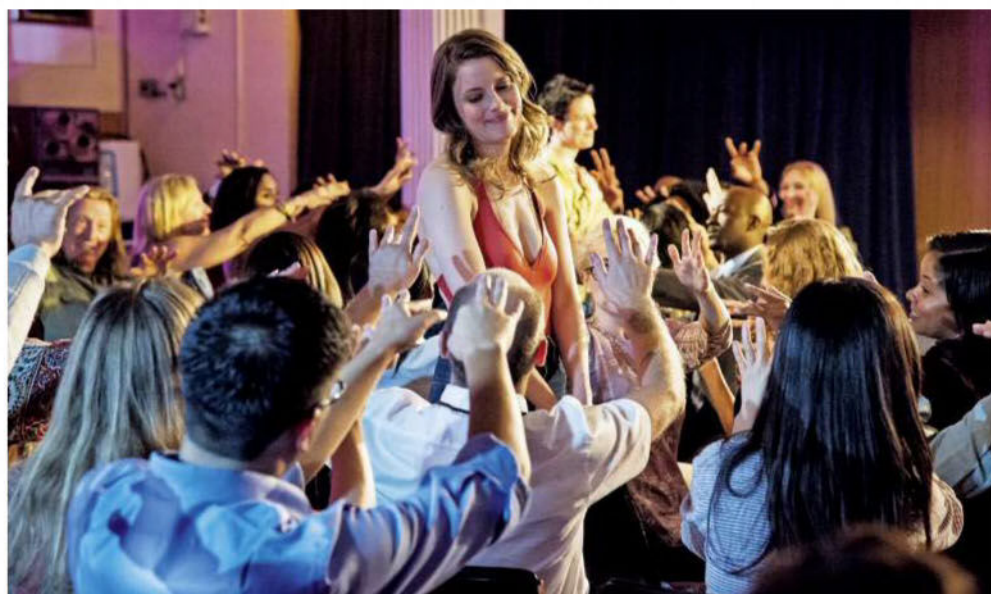


UDD APATOW co-created this Netflix comedy about two thirtysomethings fumbling their way towards a possible relationship and in

common with most Apatow projects, it's really about the terror of finding you've become a grown-up without ever learning how to actually do that.

Gillian Jacobs (*Community*) is Mickey, a radio manager whose default mood is mildly irritated and is under the influence of at least one stimulant. Paul Rust is supposed nice guy Gus, a tutor to a child star, who worries he'll screw up just about any social interaction, then does. They cross paths when both are at their lowest ebb and start hanging out, based on mutual attraction and co-dependence.

There are a lot of second-adolescence comedy shows around at the moment and it's hard to find



Gillian Jacobs as Mickey, head and shoulders above everyone else.

anything *Love* does that isn't being done better elsewhere. It's not as funny or as bold as Netflix's similar *Master Of None*, which can do episodes about feminism or second-generation immigrant guilt without ever seeming 'issue-y'. And it can't match the dialogue of the slightly younger characters in *Girls* (also produced by Apatow). It's amusing, with Apatow's loose, let's-just-see-where-this-scene-goes style and strong support characters, but in a way that raises a smile rather than a laugh.

Then there's the core problem, which hopefully will be resolved in the already commissioned second season: we aren't given much reason to root for these two as a couple. Gus and Mickey don't seem

especially well-matched and there appears little shortage of other options — by far the funniest episode sees Gus dating Mickey's roommate Bertie (a sunny Claudia O'Doherty, who could carry her own series as the optimistic Australian new to LA), so it's not as if they're each other's only shot. Also, Gus is pretty awful, and not just because he's the sort of person who goes to a party and starts playing a guitar uninvited. He's selfish and self-pitying. Mickey's no picnic, but at least owns her screw-ups.

There's good stuff here, but it needs a stronger pull for the will-they-won't-they, otherwise there's really no reason to care about the answer. **OLLY RICHARDS**

ALSO STREAMING

SPOOKS: THE
GREATER GOOD

SM

While we wait to see whether Kit Harington will return to *Game Of Thrones*, check out his performance here as fresh-faced spy Will Holloway. Spoiler: at no point is he assaulted by wights.

FROM MARCH 18



MR. HOLMES

A

After warming up by reading a Sherlock Holmes audiobook, Ian McKellen plays the sleuth onscreen. After Christopher Lee, this makes him the second cast member of *The Lord Of The Rings* to do so. Could Sean Astin be next?

FROM MARCH 25

CAPTAIN
AMERICA: THE
WINTER SOLDIER

N

Steve Rogers (Chris Evans) takes on his colleagues at S.H.I.E.L.D.. Features Marvel's most bone-crunching action yet, including an elevator fracas you're best off not recreating at work.

FROM MARCH 12



INSIDE OUT

SM

The Good Dinosaur flopped, but Pixar's other movie of last year is good enough to compensate. The tale of a young girl moving to San Francisco — and the emotions going on inside her head — it's profound, sad and hilarious.

FROM MARCH 25

BETTER CALL
SAUL: SEASON 2

N

Vince Gilligan's *Breaking Bad* spin-off continues, with flop-sweating Jimmy McGill (Bob Odenkirk) edging ever closer towards corruption. Will we get a Walter White cameo this time?

FROM MARCH 8



CLOCKWISE

A

Are you fed up with trying to race home to catch John Cleese's underrated farce on TV, and always getting into a series of wacky misadventures on the way? Well, now you can just stream it any time you like.

FROM MARCH 1

CROUCHING
TIGER, HIDDEN
DRAGON: SWORD
OF DESTINY

N

There's no Ang Lee in the director's chair this time but his replacement, legendary fight choreographer Yuen Woo-Ping, might yet make this a must-see.

FROM FEBRUARY 26



Farewell My Concubine

★★★★★

1993 / FROM MARCH 21 / CERT. 15

DVD BR

**ONCE UPON A TIME
IN THE EAST**



DOMINATED FOR two Oscars and still China's sole Palme D'Or success, Chen Kaige's elegant epic is a key work of the 'Fifth Generation'

— the titles that introduced Chinese filmmakers of the mid 1980s to early '90s to broader Western audiences. It's also just been released in HD (coupled with a short 'making of' feature) — about time, too, given one of those Academy nods was for Gu Changwei's gorgeous,

painterly cinematography.

Self-adapted from Lilian Lee's 1985 novel (in an unusual move the author published a revised version in 1993, taking in the film's alterations), it's an ambitious piece, the tale of two lifelong friends set against the many cultural and political upheavals experienced by China over the 20th century. From the start, in 1930s Peking, it's a brutal watch, as a boy student from the opera school smashes a brick against his head purely to distract a rioting crowd. Minutes later, we see the mother of young would-be actor Douzi hack off a superfluous (and in professional terms ruinous) sixth finger with a cleaver, 'signing' his training contract in the child's blood. Let us be under no illusion: these are desperate times.

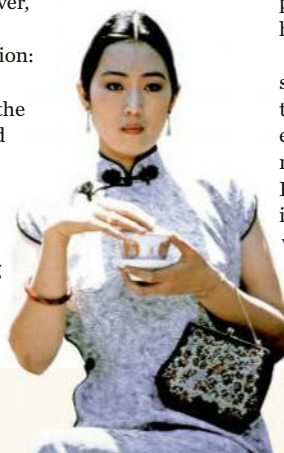
Yet such circumstances can forge the strongest bonds. So it is for Douzi and fellow student Shitou, who survive the school's savage regime to become opera's most celebrated double act, the adult Douzi (Leslie Cheung) taking the *dan* (female) roles, Shitou (Zhang Fengyi) the *jing* (male). Life mirroring art, on-stage concubine Douzi is by

Above: "I'll be off then." "Right, see ya."
Below: Not so much as a broken Rich Tea left in the tin.

now unrequitedly in love with Shitou, so you can be sure the emotional pitch will rise higher still when Gong Li's courtesan shows up to come between them.

It's a love triangle that could seem hackneyed, especially to a Western audience steeped in formula romcoms. Yet Kaige gracefully matches form with content — our two opera stars live as if *in* one, buffeted by its key tropes of love, death and, crucially, betrayal — while also drawing out the complexities of these central relationships, aided by three terrific lead performances. Melodrama this certainly is, but you believe in these people, their acute pain, their quiet heartbreaks, their even smaller hopes.

Nearly three hours long, the pace is stately, and as the destructive power of the political over the personal becomes ever more explicit, the weight of such misery threatens to crush the film. Yet Kaige and Lee leaven the piece with timely injections of black humour and insight, while moments of tenderness anchor the more lurid twists in emotional truth. Come the shattering end, patience has been well rewarded. **LIZ BEARDSWORTH**



ALSO OUT

**The Water Babies**

★★★

1978 / FROM MARCH 21 / CERT. U

DVD BR

→ If you thought *Bedknobs And Broomsticks* was too realistic, try this '70s curio, in which a chimney sweep falls into an animated underwater world. James Mason voices a mustachioed shark, the songs are jaunty and its young hero is more ebullient than *Oliver Twist*. Rough-hewn compared to Ghibli or Pixar, but not without trippy charm. **PDS**

**Ed Wood**

★★★★

1994 / FROM NOW / CERT. 15

BR

→ The wacky world of director Edward D. Wood Jr. is reimagined in sumptuous monochrome in Tim Burton's double-Oscar-winning biopic. Fusing the kitsch and macabre, it's a subject that fits its director like a cosy coffin. Johnny Depp is a riot as Wood, but Martin Landau leaves the indelible impression as fallen horror idol Bela Lugosi. **ES**

**Waking Life**

★★★★

2001 / FROM MARCH 14 / CERT. 15

DVD BR

→ Richard Linklater's most cerebral film explores the nature of existence via one young man's conversations and a succession of thoughtful characters, including the *Before* series' Jesse and Celine and Linklater himself, punishing a pinball machine. This extras-packed special edition has commentaries, short films, deleted scenes and more. **LB**

**Audition**

★★★★★

1999 / FROM FEBRUARY 29 / CERT. 18

DVD BR

JAPANESE HORROR STORY

WHEN IT CAME OUT in 1999, Takashi Miike's *Audition* marked a thrillingly unsettling confluence of two fertile new strands in horror: the emergence of Japan as a novel source of fearsomely original genre pieces, and the dubious pleasures of torture porn. Despite both now being on the wane, thankfully in the latter's case, the film still stands out as a puckishly unpleasant cruelty-fest, which disappoints only in abandoning its interesting gender-war themes in

favour of ankle-slicing *Grand Guignol*.

There are vague shades of *Vertigo* in Miike's tale of lonely widower Shigehiko (Ryo Ishibashi), who decides to audition young actresses for a non-existent film; he's actually picking a new wife. His pursuit of an idealised woman, despite the fact he is surrounded by eminently real and appealing ones, is the clearest Hitchcockian echo, and of course it's possible to read *Audition* as not much more than a Japanese retread of *Fatal Attraction*, complete with ill-fated family pet. For the first two thirds, though, there's more to it than that, particularly Ishibashi's performance as the misguided suitor — he's a curiously sympathetic, guileless chauvinist.

A bizarre nested dream/flashback at the beginning of the third act, fleshing out plot elements that Shigehiko can't possibly know, is a narrative step too far, but by then Miike has jubilantly committed to *Audition*'s climax. It's one of the most audacious symphonies of sadism ever committed to screen, and will still have you lunging for the pause button and the gin. *Kiri-kiri-kiri-kiri...* **ADAM SMITH**

S&M dentistry could still catch on.

BEGIN THE BINGE

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HERE CAN BE FEW lovelier things than making it through another working week and finding yourself with two whole days — not

to mention three nights — to kick back on the sofa in your pants, with friends (also in their pants), pizza and some fine home entertainment. From *Crimson Peak* to *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay — Part 2*, there is a plethora of reasons not to leave the house all weekend. To get you started, check out findanyfilm.com, and don't forget to share your choices using the hashtag #MovieWeekender. Here are some of our recommendations. You're welcome.



Johnny Depp, slick and sinister as *Black Mass*' Whitey Bulger.

Black Mass

AKA The Return Of The Real Johnny Depp. The actor is unrecognisable and completely mesmerising as Whitey Bulger, the real-life Boston-Irish gangster recruited by his childhood pal, FBI agent John Connolly (Joel Edgerton), to supply intel for the Feds in return for immunity from prosecution for his own shady dealings. Director Scott Cooper (*Out Of The Furnace*, *Crazy Heart*) paints an engrossing picture of the two men's lives, upping the ante further as Connolly is seduced by the gangster lifestyle. A terrific supporting cast (standouts include Benedict Cumberbatch, Jesse Plemons, Julianne Nicholson and Dakota Johnson) and a '70s muted look make this a richly rewarding watch. *Out on Digital HD, DVD and Blu-ray on March 21.*

The Lady In The Van

The best of British over a funny, moving and thought-provoking 104 minutes. Adapted from Alan Bennett's play, itself ripped from his own life, it charts the relationship between the writer (a pitch-perfect Alex Jennings) and the eccentric pensioner (Maggie Smith) he lets stay in his drive after the 'liberal' neighbours and council want her moved on. Bennett himself is a quietly fascinating character, but the film is at its best when it delivers Smith in full flow, *Downton*'s Dowager downsized to a mobile home (a crème brûlée has never been accepted with such glorious disdain). Chief Bennett interpreter Nicholas Hytner keeps it cosy, but never descends into sentiment. *Out on DVD and Blu-ray on March 7.*



Maggie Smith might have been better trying Kwik Fit.



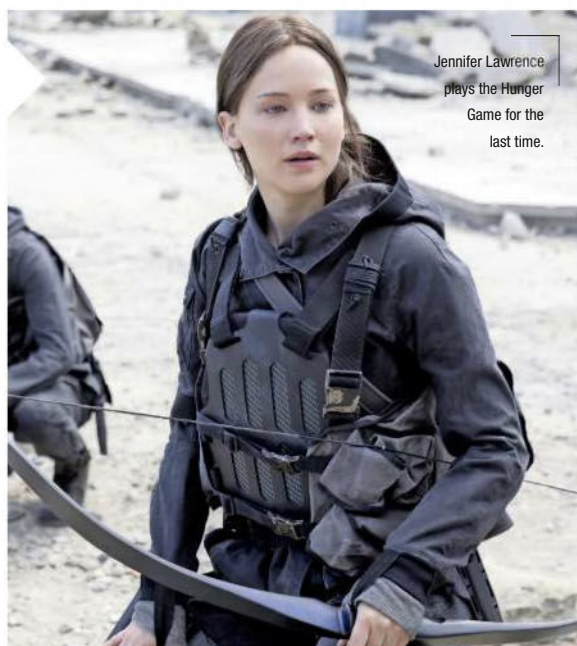
Spectre will surely shrink before gadgets of this complexity...

Spectre

After *Skyfall*, Sam Mendes returns for a second exhilarating adventure with Mr. Bond. Triggered by a message from Judi Dench's M (via video, not a ouija board), 007 (Daniel Craig) travels across the globe (Mexico, Austria, Tangiers, Millbank) on the trail of an organisation so wicked it holds its board meetings in the dark. Sumptuous to look at, it weaves together dark, knotty threads from previous Craig-era Bond films but is also a glorious celebration of what we love about the series: great action (planes, trains and automobiles), arch humour, style in spades plus the return of a certain white cat. Roll on *numero 25*. Out on Digital HD, DVD and Blu-ray now.

The Hunger Games: Mockingjay — Part 2

This time, it's war... After the relative water-treading of *Mockingjay — Part 1*, *Part 2* sees the Districts launch a major assault on the ruined Capitol, as Katniss (Jennifer Lawrence, still the franchise's trump card) dodges booby traps amid the impressive architecture on her mission to bump off President Snow (Donald Sutherland). Interestingly for a blockbuster it doesn't shy from trauma or political engagement, but also delivers fantastic action. A sad goodbye to Philip Seymour Hoffman, who excels in his final moments on film, and a fitting goodbye to our favourite tribute. Out on DVD and Blu-ray on March 21.



Jennifer Lawrence plays the Hunger Game for the last time.

Suffragette

On paper, it sounds like a worthy period drama, but Sarah Gavron's eviscerating feature is anything but. Rather than present a top-down view of the Suffragette movement, Abi Morgan's sharp, intelligent screenplay finds a way in through Carey Mulligan's put-upon factory worker who is slowly drawn into a fight she can't ignore. Mulligan is moving as the woman trying to remain true to new political convictions in the face of her old life, while Gavron's work is equally impressive, the struggle shot with an energy and urgency that outstrips most action films. What's more, its much-discussed ending highlights how this is a battle that is very much ongoing. Out on Digital HD now. Out on DVD and Blu-ray on February 29.

Crimson Peak

A huge house. Windswept moors. A doomed love story. This is Gothic romance Guillermo del Toro-style, a sumptuous, scary, intoxicating treat that blows the cobwebs off literary staples. Mia Wasikowska plays an American novelist (named Cushing — very Hammer horror) swept back to Britain by a dashing baronet (Tom Hiddleston) to start a new life in his imposing country pile, where his unhinged sister (a terrific Jessica Chastain) is also resident. Despite the excellent A-list cast, the star is Allerdale Hall, a beautifully designed mansion of menace — the walls bleed blood, for starters — and the sense of dread is tangible. You'll be checking under the floorboards for days. Out on DVD and Blu-ray now.



Tom Hiddleston and Mia Wasikowska succumb to dark desires.



Anne-Marie Duff and Carey Mulligan change history.

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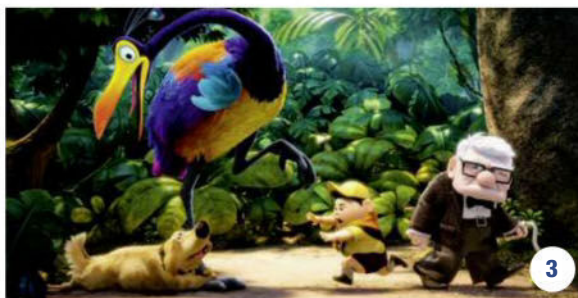
“Its study of love, loss and recovery grows more impressive.”

Up

2009 / OUT NOW / CERT. U

DVD BR A

PIXAR'S SOARAWAY SUCCESS



1 Carl and Ellie in the early days, thrilled to install that later-so-resonant mailbox.

2 Pensioner Carl, heartbroken and lonely after Ellie's death, takes flight.

3 Somewhat against the odds, Dug, Kevin and Russell reawaken Carl's love for life.

the most beautiful piece of film music this century, courtesy of MVP Michael Giacchino. We're still only 11 minutes in, but this sequence shapes everything to come. Through changing fashions and greying hair we see time pass — until Ellie passes too, and Carl is left isolated, his home under threat from heartless developers. They don't know or care about the lifetime of memories it holds, and when he's faced with eviction Carl ties thousands of balloons to his fireplace and just takes off instead. The moment when that house first soars is surreally beautiful, more Miyazaki than Mickey Mouse, and remains unsurpassed in modern American animation. The light passing through the rainbow of balloons fills a little girl's room, and it's hard not to grin like an idiot with pure wonder. But the fantasy works because we are, by now, convinced of Carl's reality.

Ellie remains a potent presence for him, represented by a mailbox, an armchair, a book and particularly the house; it takes the entire movie for any living person to become as important to Carl as these tangible reminders. There's a critique of modern life in there: only by letting go of material things does Carl reconnect to his humanity.

And there's a melancholy undercurrent throughout: we can't be sure that he ever intends to land again, and he shows no evidence of any plans after reaching the inhospitable Paradise

Falls where he and Ellie always hoped to go. It's only when he discovers boy scout Russell (Jordan Nagai) clinging desperately to his porch that Carl has any reason to return. And during his adventure on the Venezuelan *tepu*, Carl is virtually forced into new bonds with Russell, odd bird Kevin and talking dog Dug (co-director Bob Peterson), who give him a reason to let Ellie go.

Christopher Plummer's Charles Muntz, the villain of the piece, also fits the theme. He's a monomaniacal outcast with a parody of emotional connection (he loves his dogs) rather than the real thing, and therefore is what Carl could become without these innocents who prove his salvation. The film does futz with the physical capabilities of its 70-ish hero and 92 year-old baddie in the last act in order to stage an airship-based sword-and-cane fight. But who could quibble about a little derring-do when there are literal aerial dogfights to enjoy? Even the happy ending, apparently free of legal consequences or awkward questions about Russell's welfare, passes unremarked because we could never root against these characters.

It's a bold move to make a grumpy, bereaved old man the protagonist of your brightly coloured animation, but Docter, Pixar's gutsiest filmmaker, somehow knew it would work. Though Carl was physically modelled on Spencer Tracy and Walter Matthau, two similarly hot-tempered curmudgeons, his underlying sweetness came from Docter's friendships with the last of the Nine Old Men, Disney's legendary animators, and in particular from Joe Grant, who gave Carl his imagination. Carl is a square, almost literally given his design, but Ellie recognised in him what we come to see in the film: he has an unlimited capacity for daring, and a heart as big as the world.

WORDS
HELEN O'HARA

SOMETIMES A FILM'S OWN BRILLIANCE proves a stumbling block. The principal criticism of *Up* — virtually the sole criticism anyone can muster — is that its first few minutes provide such an emotional whammy that the rest is underwhelming by comparison. Like *Saving Private Ryan*, *Austin Powers In*

Goldmember or Pixar's own *WALL•E*, the sheer dazzle of the opening is almost impossible to surpass. But on repeat viewings the rest of the film only improves, and its study of love, loss and recovery grows more and more impressive.

Up sprang from frustration and social anxiety, director Pete Docter's fantasy of being able to fly away from awkward or difficult situations — a wish we've all shared. The image at the film's heart, a multi-coloured house floating away under a host of helium balloons, captures both that adult desire to escape responsibility and a more fundamental, child-like longing to believe in impossible things. The plot writhed through endless, outlandish permutations around the central idea, involving floating castles and a bird whose eggs were the fountain of youth, but the key was keeping the fantasy at just the right level.

So the film begins with a thoroughly grounded relationship, one that lasts (almost) a lifetime. A shy little boy, Carl (voiced here by Jeremy Leary, but Ed Asner in his older guise), who dreams of becoming an explorer, meets a wild girl called Ellie (Elizabeth Docter, the director's daughter) with the same notion. Despite a disastrous first encounter, their relationship blossoms.

Their life together is summed up in 'Married Life', a moving dance through the couple's triumphs and tragedies scored by

The Seven-Ups

1973
★★★★



FROM MARCH 7
CERT. 12

BR

→ Or *The French Connection* 1.5. Same producer, same bleak New York streets and the same star, with Roy Scheider duplicating his dirty cop. The Mafia-kidnapping plot gets into a tangle, but there's much to love about Philip D'Antoni's stark thriller, which restages *Psycho*'s shower scene in a carwash and boasts an immense, grunting car chase to rival *Bullitt*.

Fixed Bayonets!

1951
★★★★



FROM NOW
CERT. PG

DVD BR

→ Sam Fuller's Korean War classic bunkers down in a snowbound outpost with a platoon as they wait for the Red Army. There are mighty bursts of action, but the prevailing mood is one of clenched desperation: in Fuller's world, heroism was always an act of brutal necessity. The final scene offers cinema's first, brief glimpse of James Dean.

Black Widow

1987
★★



FROM MARCH 7
CERT. 15

BR

→ "She mates! She kills!" And all in shoulder-pads wide enough to land a plane on. Bob Rafelson's 1980s noir pits Debra Winger's agent against Theresa Russell's maneater, plotting hubbicide in a Hawaiian resort. The result is *Beige Widow*: blandly directed, soapily played, sexy as a sock, devoid of jeopardy and cursed with a script polka-dotted with plot-holes.

Tomorrow We Live

1943
★★★



FROM NOW
CERT. U

DVD

→ Twelve strangers make a deal with a ruined tycoon: spend the day getting revenge on their tormenters, then join him in a suicide pact. The set-up suggests horror, but this 1940s portmanteau offers seven tales of *carpe diem* cheer. There are too many stories but its crazed finale, following a widow's raucous Margate away day, is bracingly berserk.

¡Three Amigos!

1986
★★★★



FROM MARCH 28
CERT. PG

BR

→ Cowboy vigilantes Steve Martin, Martin Short and Chevy Chase rescue a village from Mexican bandits. Or pretend to. They're actually film stars there by mistake. Despite feeling like an over-stretched *SNL* sketch, the farce is strong in John Landis' likable comedy that sees the peak-form stars go full-buffoon. Though they're all upstaged by a singing bush.

Valentino

1977
★★★



FROM NOW
CERT. 18

DVD BR

→ Ken Russell's flop biopic of the 1920s Casanova is typically divisive. Untroubled by the facts, Russell is more interested in staging a baroque Hollywood satire than his subject's life. Casting Rudolf Nureyev is bafflingly perverse (great dancer, lousy actor) but this remains a sense-rattling experience realised with an eye-fizzing visual opulence.

The Amorous Prawn

1962
★★★



FROM NOW
CERT. PG

DVD

→ This scampi-flavoured 1962 Brit-com sees a general's wife turn her husband's HQ into a tourist-fleeing hotel. Cue rambunctious farce that takes great delight in getting one over on the stiff-upper-lips. Her Royal Huskiness Joan Greenwood heads an old-pro ensemble featuring Dennis Price, Cecil Parker and Derek Nimmo. John Barry wrote the jaunty score.

Happy Gilmore

1996
★★★



FROM NOW
CERT. 12

DVD

→ Remember when Adam Sandler was fun? Here his ice-hockey thug turns golfing champ, armed with a drive like an Exocet missile. Packed with slapstick and random alligator-wrestling, this 20th anniversary edition is one of his low-brow highs, and a reminder that Sandler's man-child shtick was, once upon a movie, a lethal comedy weapon.

Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead

1990
★★★



FROM NOW
CERT. PG

DVD BR

→ Gary Oldman is Guildenstern. Tim Roth is Rosencrantz. Or is it the other way around? Told from the point of view of two disposable bit-parters, Tom Stoppard's film tickles *Hamlet* into an existential comedy, with its luckless duo blissfully unaware they're trapped inside a tragedy. A tad stagey, perhaps, but it's played and written with a subversive wink.

Batman v Superman: Dawn Of Justice: The Art Of The Film

★★★★

AUTHOR PETER APERLO / OUT MARCH 22

BATTLE STORIES

ACK SNYDER'S upcoming tentpole is heavily inspired by graphic novels, so there's something satisfying about seeing shots from it rendered as inky concept art. This coffee-table compendium is stuffed with moody, beautiful vistas — a giant statue of Superman kneeling in Metropolis' Heroes Park, Bruce Wayne's De-Niro's-pad-from-*Heat*-esque glass lakehouse, a crumbling Batcave in which everything dangles from the ceiling via wires. Stark and ultra-serious, the artwork confirms what we all suspected: the darkest hour is just before the dawn. Of justice.

Though it's half a celebration of the film's aesthetic and half a stroll through its story, there's a certain caginess here, perhaps because the book is out three days before the movie. There's precious little about Wonder Woman, while cape-hating hellion Doomsday doesn't get much more of a showing than he did in the trailers. On the plus side, we learn that Jeremy Irons' Alfred will wear an apron at one point. There's some behind-the-scenes juice: Jesse Eisenberg had his hair shaved off on camera, Amy Adams modelled her Lois Lane on Nora Ephron, Snyder himself got down on the carpet



Concept art for Batman and Superman's big showdown.

and posed as reference for the Superman statue. And a satisfying page-count is devoted to the rumble in the concrete jungle between Bats and Supes. Two words: lead grenades. Judging by one evocative image of the two superheroes exhausted and drenched in supersweat, it's going to be an 11-round affair.

It's a handsome tome, but where it falls down is in the lack of specificity. There's a reliance on hazy soundbites — "The first movie was about fathers. This movie is about mothers" — and not enough nitty-gritty. For real micro-detail, you'll want to check out the Dark Knight-centric companion book *Batman v Superman: Dawn Of Justice: Tech Manual* (also published by Titan), which veers so far in the other direction that it includes 31 rejected Bat logos and a schematic of the new Batmobile. For the record, the vehicle has "Infused Kryptonite Skin Coating", but no Bat-nav. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**



ALSO OUT

Alex Cox's Introduction To Film

★★★★

AUTHOR ALEX COX / OUT NOW



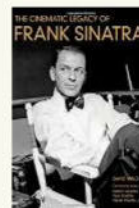
→ The *Repo Man* director and original host of the much-missed BBC strand *Moviedrome* has turned a series of lectures on film into an excellent

beginners' guide to movies. Interactive in nature (you'll have to pause to watch clips and whole films, some so obscure you may have to obtain them from Cox himself) and fascinating throughout, it's as close to a revival of *Moviedrome* as we're going to get. **CH**

The Cinematic Legacy Of Frank Sinatra

★★★

AUTHOR DAVID WILLS / OUT NOW



→ David Wills, who wrote *Marilyn Monroe: Metamorphosis* and *Audrey: The 60s*, charts Sinatra's evolution from fresh-faced crooner to Oscar-earning

heavyweight via publicity shots, film stills and posters. Essays from Sinatra's children and Wills himself provide overview and personal perspectives, but there's nothing here to justify the book's premium pricing (£17.99 for the paperback). **DJ**

I Want It Now!

★★★★

AUTHOR JULIE DAWN COLE / OUT NOW



→ The making of *Willy Wonka & The Chocolate Factory*, as told by Veruca Salt herself (or the actress who played her, anyway). There's

not much here that you can't get from the cast DVD commentary or assorted articles, but it's nostalgic and (aptly) very sweet. Cole reveals that she found *Wonka* author Roald Dahl a bit scary, and that she nicked an everlasting gobstopper. But the biggest bombshell? She doesn't even like chocolate! **NDS**

FURTHER READING

MORE BOOKS ABOUT THE DUELLING TITANS



The Making Of Superman (David Michael Petrou)

Hard to find but worth the effort, this candidly chronicles the production of the original movie.



Batman: The Complete History (Les Daniels)

It only goes up to 2004, so not as complete as it claims, but still a cracking look at the Dark Knight through the ages.



The Dark Knight Returns (Frank Miller)

The 1986 comic-book miniseries that inspired the visuals of the new film. Caution: not for kids.



1 Critical Mass

"Ben (*Wheatley*) comes from a solid place, and I suppose that fits with me. It was very simpatico. [With this film] you could go very dark, very quickly. Our aim was to present [the tower block] as a happening, living, breathing sort of place."

2 Silent Corridors

"This track is trying to give a suggestion of where Laing's (*Tom Hiddleston*) headspace may be. There's an underlying melancholy to him. Whilst there's a very strong, busy community in this block, it can also be very lonely."

3 The World Beyond The High-Rise

"We worked with a lot of different stuff on this score. I'd written a 'gamelan' (*an Indonesian style of music*) part in a Western style, but the Belgian gamelan players refused to play it because it was not traditional. I came back to London to work with a guy called Alasdair Malloy: he plays a glass armonica, invented by Ben Franklin. He created this faux-gamelan thing out of steel scaffold pipes. It brought an extra weirdness."

4 The Vertical City

"This was the one place we allowed ourselves to go 'period', if you like. We didn't want to do it too much because, as Ben says, the book (*by J.G. Ballard*) was written looking forwards, but the movie is done looking back. You had this opportunity to be sort of timeless."

Above: Tom Hiddleston and Luke Evans find it's tough at the top.
Below: Mansell on the red carpet.



5 The Circle Of Women

6 "Built Not For Man, But For Man's Absence"

7 Danger In The Streets Of The Sky

"This is where it's all kicking off! Ben came over to Los Angeles for about five days and we worked through the entire score. It was very collaborative and that's what I'm always looking for."

8 "Somehow The High-Rise Played Into The Hands Of The Most Petty Impulses"

"All the track titles are built out of the book... I'd read the book a few years ago, but I re-read it when we were doing the film to find titles or phrases that would be evocative of the experience."

9 Cine-Camera Cinema

10 A Royal Flying School

"This cue didn't end up in the film. When Ben is mixing the film, he can go, 'Well, we actually don't really need that.' We've had so much music by the time you get to that point in the film, you really need to start taking a breath. But the magic of it is having the chance to try these ideas."

11 The Evening's Entertainment

12 Blood Garden

EMPIRE PLAYLIST



Strip Clubs

- 1 Pony Ginuwine *Magic Mike XXL*
- 2 Word Up Gun *Barb Wire*
- 3 Candy Girl New Edition *Dogma*
- 4 Smack My Bitch Up The Prodigy *Closer*
- 5 Don't Walk Away FireHouse *The Wrestler*
- 6 You Can Leave Your Hat On Joe Cocker *The Full Monty*
- 7 Fired Up Funky Green Dogs *The Sopranos*
- 8 New Skin Siouxsie And The Banshees *Showgirls*
- 9 Sweet Emotion Aerosmith *We're The Millers*
- 10 Nasty Girl Vanity 6 *Beverly Hills Cop*
- 11 Let's Misbehave Irving Aaronson And His Commanders *Pennies From Heaven*
- 12 G.D.F.R. Flo Rida *Deadpool*

TO LISTEN TO THE ABOVE, SEARCH 'EMPIRE MAGAZINE' ON SPOTIFY.



LEGO Marvel's Avengers

★★★★★

OUT NOW / PC, PS3, PS4, 3DS, XBOX ONE, XBOX 360, Wii U

ATTACK THE BLOCKS



NOTHER YEAR, another clutch of block-busting LEGO adventures, the latest returning to the Marvel universe in a follow-up to 2013's *LEGO Marvel Super Heroes*. Rather than spinning its own brick-laden yarn, however, *LEGO Marvel's Avengers* retreads the storylines of both of Joss Whedon's Avengers movies — making liberal use of the films' dialogue in the process. As you might expect, the focus is on keeping things lighthearted and digestible, but there's no shortage of

content here, with *Thor: The Dark World*, *Captain America: The First Avenger* and *Iron Man 3* all slotted in as part of the game's extended universe. With a supporting cast that numbers into the hundreds, pretty much everyone you can think of gets a turn this time around.

The game's semi-open world provides a playground for trying out the characters' new abilities, such as the Hulk's devastating new hyper jumps — which allow him to leap high and land on top of enemies, ouch — or Iron Man's natty Hulkbuster Armor, as seen in *Age Of Ultron*. Newcomers also add some interesting quirks, such as Fin Fang Foom's penchant for growing to enormous sizes and crushing enemies underfoot. There's a noticeable emphasis on bigger, more fantastic heroes this time, and the gameplay's all the better for it.

Double-team moves spice up the button-mashing combat, with heroes working together in unique ways to create devastating

combos. Want to have Hulk use Iron Man as a human-sized baton, or have Thor electrify Captain America's shield to give enemies a shocking surprise? Not a problem. These combo cocktails are a high point in scuffles but also a source of irritation. Finicky positioning means they don't always connect, and it's tough to stay in the right place with hordes of enemies swarming all over you.

With its menu of situational puzzles and smashing/rebuilding brick-based architecture, the game sticks faithfully to the tried-and-tested LEGO playbook, but that's hardly a surprise given the franchise's popularity. Besides, there's so much content here that it's hard to find too much fault with cleaving to a winning formula, especially with the glut of new characters and abilities on offer. If you've not warmed to the LEGO series' charms then *LEGO Marvel's Avengers* is unlikely to change that, but for stalwart block-heads or those looking for some Avengers-themed comfort food, this is a pleasing mix of action, humour and chunky, colourful bricks.

BRITTANY VINCENT



KILL THE COMMUTE



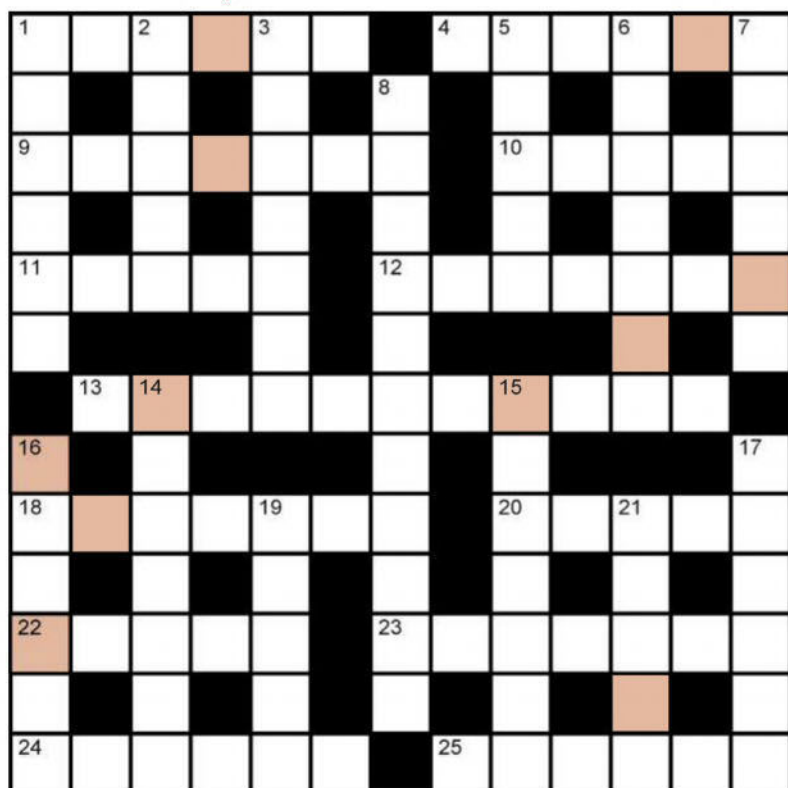
BADLAND 2 iOS

The original mobile megahit had you frantically tapping your screen to make a shaggy black blob flap around obstacles. The sequel adds a second thumb to the mix. Controversial. You can now flap forwards or backwards depending on which side of the screen you touch. It may not sound like a game-changer but the result is multi-directional mazes that make the original feel horribly limited.



MAGIC: THE GATHERING — PUZZLE QUEST iOS/ANDROID

It's the unholy union you've been waiting for: match-three gem-pushing meets collectible card battler. Surprisingly, the result is the best *Puzzle Quest* in years, where your gem-matching exploits feed a mana pool that powers your spells and creatures, which in turn melt your opponent's face. The free-to-play money-grabbing is kept to a welcome minimum, too. Result!



ACROSS

- 1 Denzel's 2012 airline jaunt (6)
 4 Law violations that will be true for Charlotte Gainsbourg this year (6)
 9 Maya seen in *Bridesmaids* (7)
 10 In which Emma Thompson provided the voice of Queen Elinor (5)
 11 Beach featured in *Saving Private Ryan's* opening sequence (5)
 12 Rodent dash with Rowan Atkinson and Whoopi Goldberg (3,4)
 13 She directed *Selma* (3,8)
 18 Cold War movie that starred Charles Bronson and Lee Remick (7)
 20 Autobiographical tale of a Mafia don portrayed by Armand Assante (5)
 22 Dinwiddie seen in *Raven's Touch*, *Elena Undone* etc. (5)
 23 Marilyn Monroe and "a raging torrent of emotion that even nature can't control" (7)
 24 She and her sisters won three Oscars in 1986 (6)
 25 Marlon Brando's acting style (6)

DOWN

- 1 Mia, star of 13 Woody Allen films (6)
 2 Land to which Judy Davis once booked a passage (5)
 3 Tom cast as Lucas Bennett in *The Impossible* (7)
 5 The kind of overlords encountered by Ben Kingsley and Gillian Anderson (5)
 6 She was Sloane Peterson in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (3,4)
 7 Spielberg, Zaillian or Seagal maybe (6)
 8 Alejandro González Iñárritu's biographical endurance tale (3,8)
 14 From which a love scene between Richard Burton and Ian McShane was famously cut (7)
 15 "Get a handle on the scandal" read the tagline for this 2005 satire (3,4)
 16 Lilo's pet (6)
 17 Oz's most famous resident (6)
 19 Mexican painter Kahlo, portrayed by Salma Hayek (5)
 21 As found in a garbage dump by Rooney Mara and co. (5)

Competition ends March 28

HOW TO ENTER Take the letters from each coloured square and rearrange them to form the name of an actor, actress, director or character. Text 'EMPIRE' to 83070, followed by your answer, name and address (with a space between each element of your message). Texts cost 50p plus standard operator costs. Lines close at midnight, March 28. Winners are selected at random. See below for terms and conditions.

MARCH ANSWERS ACROSS 7 Prince, 8 Exodus, 9 Alda, 10 Everyday, 11 Contact, 13 Jet Li, 15 Sheen, 17 Tootsie, 20 Brooklyn, 21 Kite, 22 Noiret, 23 Enigma. **DOWN** 1 Grillo, 2 Anna, 3 Rebecca, 4 Fever, 5 Body Heat, 6 Duvall, 12 The Hours, 14 Sounder, 16 Herzog, 18 In Time, 19 Klute 21 Kris.

ANAGRAM Cate Blanchett

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: One entry per person. Texts cost 50p + standard network rate. Ask the bill payer's permission before entering. Entries must be received before March 29 or will not be valid (but the cost of the text may still be charged). One winner will be selected at random. The model of the TV and Blu-ray may vary. Competition promoted by Bauer Consumer Media Limited t/a Empire ("Empire"). Empire's choice of winner is final and no correspondence will be entered into in this regard. The winner will be notified, by phone (on the number the text was sent), between seven and ten days after the competition ends. Empire will call the winner a maximum of three times and leave one message. If the winner does not answer the phone or respond to the message within 14 days of the competition's end, Empire will select another winner and the original winner will not win a prize. Entrants must be over 18, resident in the UK and not be employed by Empire. The prize is non-negotiable with no cash alternative. Empire is not responsible for late delivery or unsatisfactory quality of the prize. Entrants agree to the collection of their personal data in accordance with Empire's privacy policy: <http://www.bauerdatapromise.co.uk/>. Winner's personal details will be given to prize provider to arrange delivery of the prize. Bauer reserves the right to amend or cancel these terms or any aspect of the competition (including the prize) at any time if required for reasons beyond its control. Any questions, please email empire@bauermedia.co.uk. Complaints will not be considered if made more than 30 days after the competition ends. Winner's details available on request (after the competition ends) by emailing empire@bauermedia.co.uk. For full T&Cs see <http://www.bauerlegal.co.uk/competition-terms.html>.

WIN!



BASED ON A HARROWING TRUE STORY FROM World War II, *Against the Sun* — starring Harry Potter's Tom Felton — sees three US Navy airmen forced to crash-land their bomber into the South Pacific, leaving them fighting for their lives on a tiny raft in the middle of the ocean. Virtual strangers, not only must they survive the not exactly insignificant elements, but also each other as their options run out and nerves fray... Also starring *12 Years A Slave's* Garrett Dillahunt and *The Lovely Bones's* Jake Abel, *Against the Sun* is out in cinemas and available to download on March 7, then on DVD on March 14. To mark its arrival we have a 40" Flatscreen LED TV and a Blu-ray player plus a copy of *Against the Sun* on DVD for one lucky winner. To be in with a chance of getting your hands on the clobber, simply solve the crossword to the left, work out the anagram and text your answer and details using the number below. Good luck!

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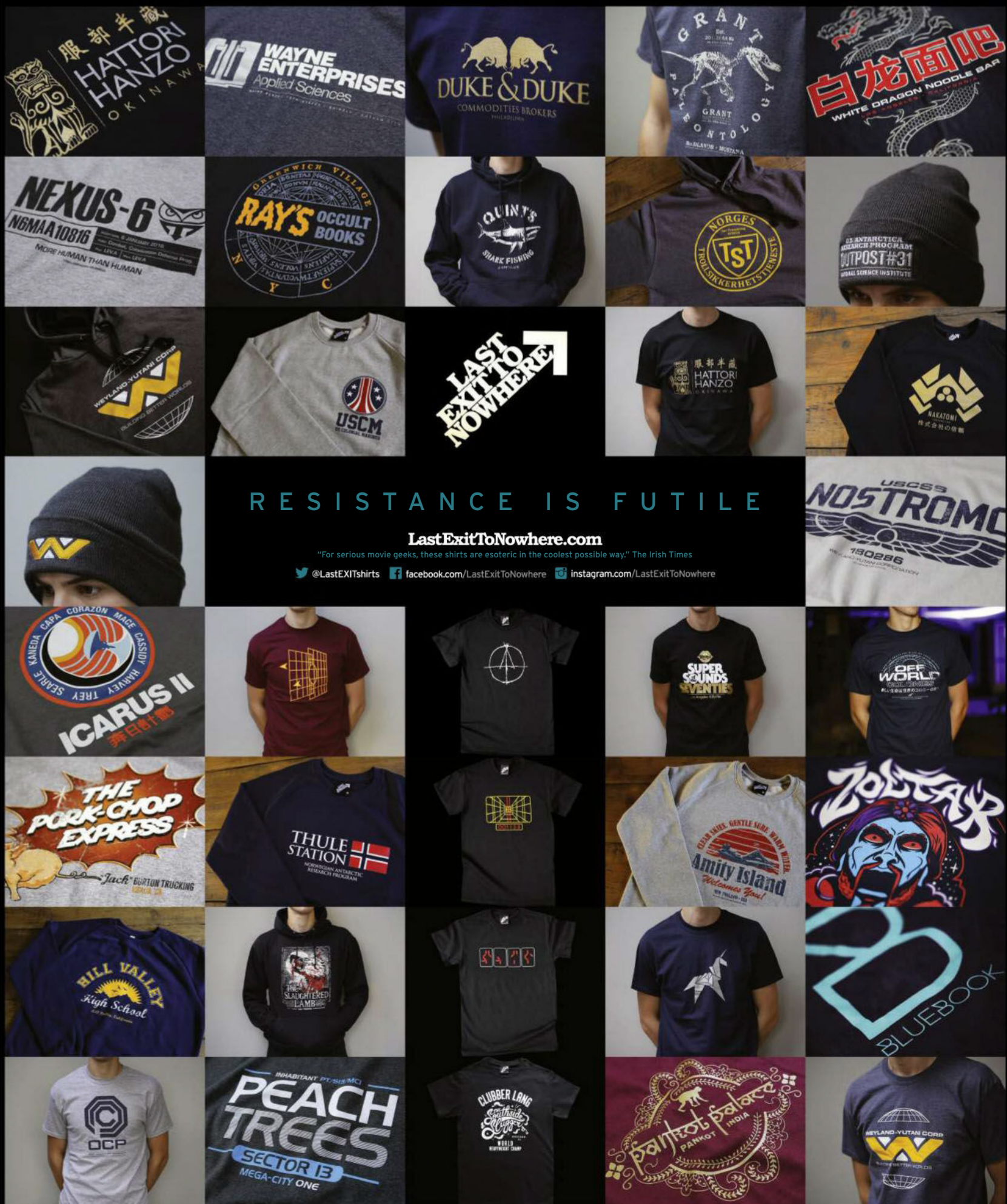
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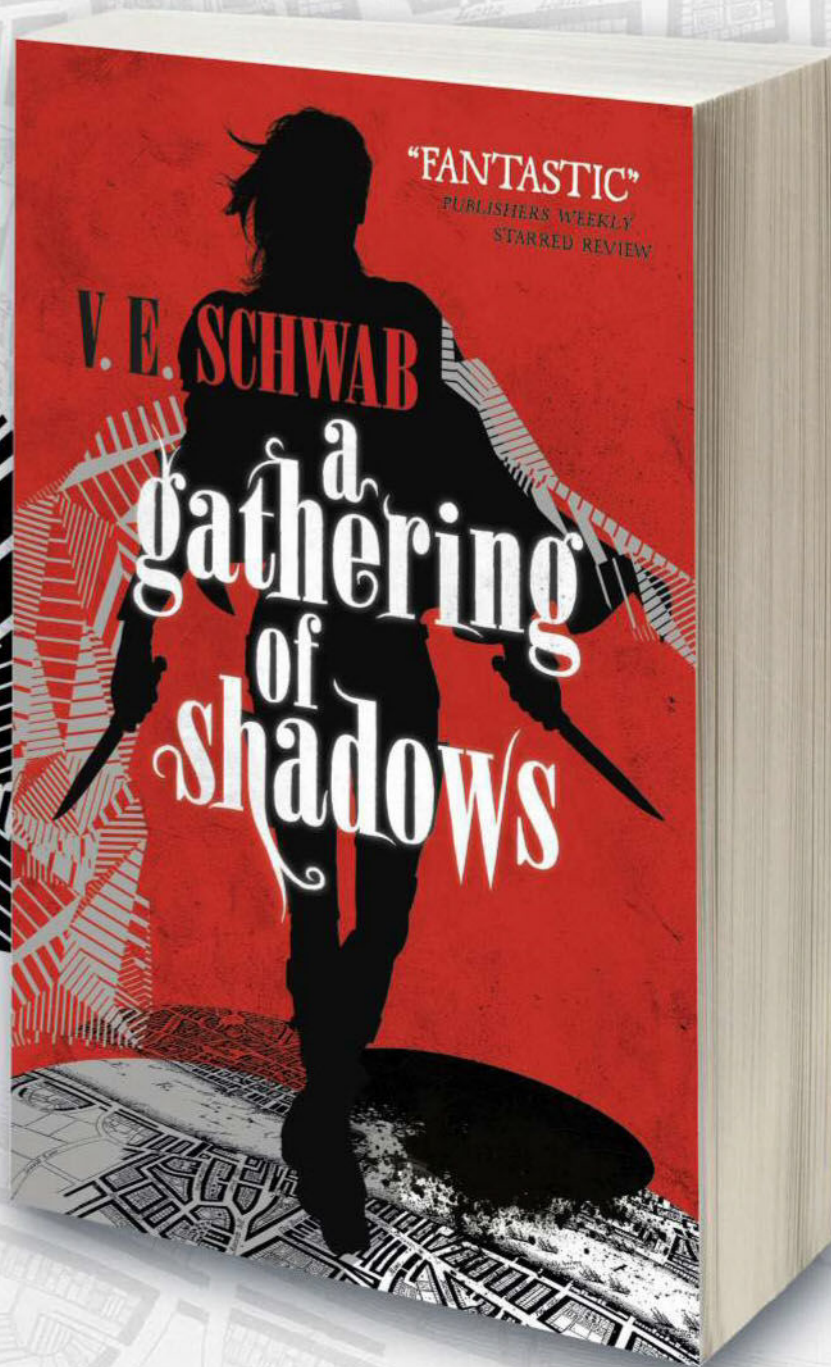
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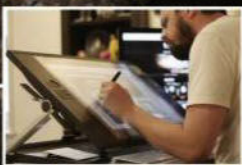


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COMMENT



JARED HARRIS SHOULD PLAY RED SKULL IN THE NEXT AVENGERS MOVIE AFTER INFINITY WAR. EXPLAIN IT WITH THE FACT THAT THE RED SKULL IS HIS REAL FACE AND THE OTHER WAS A MASK...

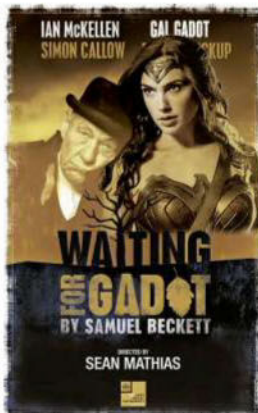
MARC SCHAUS, FACEBOOK

Thanks, Jared! Loved you in Poltergeist.



Seen *The Force Awakens* a few times. Poe Dameron is Ace Rimmer. Smoke me a kipper!

PAUL FIANDER-TURNER
(@HAVINARADOX)



ANYONE MADE THIS JOKE YET?
DARRAGH LUCEY (@DRHUXTON)

I had no idea that Captain EO even existed until Alex Godfrey's superb @empiremagazine feature. I have to see this!

**MATTHEW RODGERS
(@MAINSTREAMMATT)**

LETTER of the MONTH



DIRTY GRANDPAS

Surely the guilty verdict this month for the Hatton Garden robbery gang is the starting gun for the Hollywood movie adaptation. I would like to get in there early on casting predictions. It's just asking for the best of the best of our elder statesmen of British cinema. I'm thinking the likes of Gambon, Spall, Broadbent, McKellen and a rakish Richard E. Grant as the as-yet-uncaught sixth robber. Maybe Brian Cox as 'the muscle'! Can anyone top that?

PIERS RILEY-SMITH, LONDON,

If Winstone doesn't get a part, there'll be bleedin' 'ell to pay.



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COVER LOVER

Whoever came up with the idea of asking Jim Lee to come up with a 'Variant Cover' deserves a raise. First younger family member that comes at that cover with a fistful of crayons is going to get a World Engine unleashed on his arse...

LEONARD SULTANA, VIA EMAIL



BEAR NECESSITIES

Have to point out that the correct term for a group of bears is in fact a 'sleuth', not 'pack' as stated in the *Grizzly Man* Classic Scene in December's issue.

THOMAS "BW", VIA EMAIL

But what's the term for multiple Herzogs? A chasm? A chaos? An existentialism?

FORCE MAJEURE

Regarding your *A New Hope* Classic Scene in issue 319, all those people who think the midi-chlorians are a prequel addition, take a look at *The Making Of Star Wars* by J. W. Rinzler, p. 353. George Lucas says, "It is said that certain creatures are born with a higher awareness of the Force than humans. Their brains are different; they have more midi-chlorians in their cells." That was in 1977. They've always been there, and don't "muck up" anything.

SIMON STEFFENHAGEN, VIA EMAIL

Well, that's that cleared up. Now, can anyone explain Max Rebo?



EMPIRE CLASSIC SCENE

Ace In The Hole

"BAD NEWS SELLS BEST."

SETTING THE SCENE On its release in 1951, *Ace In The Hole* was a headache for director Billy Wilder: it did lousy box office, got panned by critics and resulted in Wilder getting sued for plagiarism. Decades on, though, it has not only acquired masterpiece status but plays as a chillingly prescient vision of gutter journalism. In this early scene, cynical reporter Chuck Tatum (Kirk Douglas), en route to a rattlesnake hunt with young colleague Herbie Cook (Robert Arthur), lays out his approach to the job. It's easy to imagine *Nightcrawler*'s Lou Bloom nodding along.

**EXT. NEW MEXICO HIGHWAY
— DAY**

Tatum and Cook are in Tatum's open car. Cook is driving, Tatum stretched out next to him, hat over his eyes. Their press identification badge is mounted on the windscreen.

Cook: You know, this could be a pretty good story, Chuck. Don't sell it short. It's quite a sight — a thousand rattlers in the underbrush and a lot of men smoking them out, bashing in their heads.

Tatum: Big deal. A thousand rattlers in the underbrush. *(He pauses)* Give me just 50 of them loose in Albuquerque. Like that leopard in Oklahoma City. The whole town in panic. Deserted streets. Barricaded houses. They're evacuating the children. Every man is armed. Fifty killers on the prowl. Fifty. One by one, they start hunting them down. They get ten, 20. It's building. They get 40, 45. They get 49. Where's the last rattler? In a kindergarten? In a church? In a crowded elevator? Where?

Cook: I give up. Where?

Tatum: In my desk drawer, fan. Stashed away, only nobody knows it, see? The story's good for another three days. Then when I'm good and ready, we come out with a big extra: "*Sun-Bulletin* snags number 50."

Cook: Where do you get those ideas?

Tatum: Herbie, boy, how long d'you go to that school of journalism?

Cook: Three years.

Tatum: Three years down the drain. Me, I didn't go to any college, but I know what makes a good story. Because before I ever worked on a paper, I sold them on a street corner. You know the first thing I found out? Bad news sells best. Because good news is no news.

A smile playing on his lips, he glances down at the fuel gauge.

Tatum: Better get some gas.

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IN CINEMAS MARCH 11